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HAROLD'S BRIDE





ALICIA'S ESCAPE.

HAROLD'S BRIDE



"Then He *did* hear me!"

Page 210.

T. NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, and New York

Harold's Bride

A TALE

BY

A. L. O. E.,

Author of "Driven into Exile," "Pictures of St. Peter,"

"The Shepherd of Bethlehem,"

"Exiles in Babylon,"

&c. &c.



THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

London, Edinburgh, and New York

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Preface.

MANY years ago a huge panorama of a vast extent of country was exhibited in London. Of what country it was memory retains no clear impression; but I recollect a remark made by the exhibiting artist. Referring to the tints of some hills pictured in the panorama, he observed, "They ought to be natural, for I took my materials from the hills themselves."

The artist's remark had slight weight, for the fact that he had used pigments taken from the actual soil was no warrant for the accuracy of his delineation; but I am reminded of that remark by the circumstances under which the following tale has been written. It was not penned in some study in London, nor in some rural home in an English county; the authoress was living, as it were, surrounded by the materials needed for her picture. The old missionary came in heated and tired from the daily round in zenanas to dip her pen and write of a zenana. The materials for her touches of natural history lay, as it were, at her elbow. She might feelingly picture little inconveniences which she herself had experienced.

Such of A. L. O. E.'s readers as are already, from former volumes, acquainted with the Hartley brothers, may perhaps like to hear how they fared when they had crossed the ocean, and had entered on the mission life which they had contemplated from boyhood. It may be that the tale will be thought suitable for reading aloud at working parties in aid of missions, and that it may help to give a more vivid idea of life in some of the more isolated stations in India. But not mere amusement is in view. A. L. O. E. would fain hope that some enthusiasts, who would undertake the work of carrying the gospel to the heathen more in a spirit of romance than that of earnest self-consecration, may be led by her book to reflect on what a solemn thing it is to be "allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel" (1 Thess. ii. 4). Some maiden, ere linking her lot to that of a missionary, may be induced to consider the responsibility attending the position of an evangelist's wife. Something far more onerous is before her than the pleasant duty of making a cheerful home for a good man; she must share the burden, she must aid in the labour, or she is likely to prove a hindrance instead of a helpmeet. By some women, even amiable ones, this responsibility is almost ignored; but by being ignored it is not avoided. May some lesson be learned from the little weaknesses and mistakes of

HAROLD'S BRIDE.

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HAROLD'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

HOUSE-BUILDING.

“WHAT’S this?—not a coolie at work ; the place a litter of bricks and dust ; the pillars of the veranda not a foot high ! Instead of growing upwards, they seem to grow downwards, like lighted candles. The bricks also are good for nothing—chipped, broken, katcha [only sun-dried], when I gave strict orders for pakka [baked]. Cannot a fellow be absent for a week without finding everything neglected, everything at a standstill?—Nabi Bakhsh ! Nabi Bakhsh !”

The call was rather angrily given, and was obeyed by a dusky, bearded man in a large dirty turban, who made an obsequious *salám* to Robin Hartley, after emerging from some corner where this overseer of the building works had been placidly smoking his hookah.

“What has become of the coolies ? have they all gone

to sleep?" cried young Hartley, in Urdu more fluent than correct. "The work seems at a deadlock, and you promised that I should find the veranda finished by my return. Do you think that we are to pay you for merely looking at rubbish like this?" Robin struck one of the bricks with his heel, and broke it to pieces.

The excuses of Nabi Bakhsh need not be detailed,—how there had been a religious feast, and of course the men could not work; then the grandmother of Karim had died, and of course every one had gone to the funeral.

"I believe that she was the fourth grandmother that has died!" exclaimed Robin, half angrily, yet half playfully, for his wrath seldom lasted for more than a minute. "Feasts, fasts, and funerals, delays and excuses, one coolie doing nothing and another helping him to do it,—it's hard to get work finished in India. But call the men now, and let them make up for lost time. My brother and the Mem [lady] will be here in a few days, and what will they say to a mass of confusion like this?"

Nabi Bakhsh went off to call the workmen. Robin, though just off a twenty-miles walk, pulled off his jacket, and set to work himself with all the vigour which youth, health, and light spirits can give. The youth talked to himself as he laboured, being fond of soliloquizing when no one was near with whom to converse.

"Only a month to build a house in, and only one thousand rupees [less than a hundred pounds] with

which to pay for bricks, mortar, and work ! It's well that the place is a small one ; but big or small it won't be ready for Harold's bride. It's hard on a delicately-nurtured young lady to be brought to such a bungalow as ours—two bed-rooms, one sitting-room, and a place for lumber, with three missionaries to share with her the limited accommodation. Besides, Alicia has no end of luggage. I cannot imagine where we shall stow it away. I suppose that Harold was right in marrying so soon—dear old fellow, he's always right—but I cannot help wishing that Colonel Graham had not been starting for England till April, so that his daughter's wedding could have been delayed till we had some corner to put her up in."

Robin paused, wiped his heated brow, and looked up at the tiny house on which he had expended a great deal of personal labour, as well as that of urging on the coolies and bricklayers, who, whenever his back was turned, would sit down for a smoke. Robin had with his own hands made all the doors, inserting in each the four panes of glass which made it serve as a window. Robin had constructed the wooden eye-lids, as he called them, to keep off the sun from the roshandáns (upper windows), which to a novice standing outside might give the false impression that the bungalow had an upper story. Robin had trampled down into something like solidity the layer of mud on the roof, which was intended to moderate heat and keep out rain. Tiles and slates

were things unknown at Talwandi. The youth was a little proud of his work, yet, as he looked up at the uncompleted dwelling, an expression of doubt, almost of dissatisfaction, came over Robin's bright young face.

"Bricks and mud have no natural affinity to beauty," he said, "not even to picturesqueness. As for comfort, even if we could get the veranda up and the mats down, the place would be too damp to be lived in. Poor Alicia must be content to squeeze herself into our nut-shell—father and I in one room, she in the other, whilst the one sitting-room, backed, or rather fronted, by the veranda, must serve as drawing-room, dining-room, study, reception and school room, and whatever else be required. Well, happily we are not likely to quarrel any more than do double kernels in one nut."

Robin glanced down the dusty road, bordered with ragged cactus, which led to the small native town of Talwandi, which was the head-quarters of this branch of the mission. A town it was with some dignity of its own, as it boasted not only two little mosques with domes, and a big Hindu temple with stumpy spire, but one house of some height and pretensions, domineering over some hundreds of low houses built of mud.

"I wish that father would come home," said Robin to himself. "But he did not expect to have me back so soon, with the appetite of half-a-dozen jackals. Father had ordered nothing for himself but *dál* [a kind of dried pease] and chapatties [flat baked cakes of flour]; but I

wanted better fare. As soon as I arrived I pronounced the death-warrant on the fattest hen in the compound, so there will be something fit for dinner." Robin resumed his work, still soliloquizing. "Dear father is not fit to have charge of his own comfort; he is always thinking about people's souls, and has little regard for bodies. Harold and I had agreed together never to leave him without a son beside him, for thirty years of hard work are telling upon him; but how could we help being absent on such an occasion as this? Father himself would not hear of my not attending Harold's wedding, and Harold—" Robin interrupted himself in the midst of his sentence with the exclamation, "Here's father at last!"

Mr. Hartley was coming along the cactus-bordered way, a heavy bag in one hand, an open umbrella held up by the other, and a thick hat made of pith on his head. The missionary was pale, thin, and somewhat bent, with many a line on his face; but his mild countenance lighted up with pleasure as he caught sight of his son. Robin flung down his mattock, and bounding forward the youth greeted his parent with a most unconventional hug, which was as warmly though more quietly returned. Robin's impetuous affection was more that of the child than that of a youth with down on his lip. It had often been said that Robin, with his rough curly head, his joyous spirit, and his absolute freedom from guile, would never, should he live to a patriarch's age, be anything more than a boy.

Whilst, laughing and chatting, Robin is accompanying his father into the little house, the position of the Hartley family at the time when my story begins may be briefly described. The circle consisted of the veteran missionary and his two sons. Harold, the elder, on receiving deacons' orders, had started to join his father on the mission-field in the Panjab. Robin, who was several years younger than his brother, had accompanied Harold, as the youth himself said, "as a kind of general helper, a Jack-of-all-trades — carpenter, blacksmith, builder, tailor, cobbler, and what not besides;" an unpaid but valuable servant to the mission. In vain the lad had been urged to complete his education in college. Robin perhaps under-estimated his own powers as a student. He compared himself to a rough knotted branch that might do well enough for a bludgeon, but could by no skill be shaped and planed into a library table. He would be a stick in Harold's hand, and perhaps help him over rough bits of the road, or assist him to knock down some difficulty in his way. Mr. Hartley made no objection to Robin's plans, for he yearned to have both his sons under his roof; and Harold secretly rejoiced that his own advice had not been taken, and that he should not be obliged to leave behind him a brother whom he would so greatly have missed.

After about a year of earnest preparatory work at Talwandi, Harold had gone to the city of Lahore to pass a double examination—that which mission-agents must

undergo, and that which precedes admission into priests' orders. Both examinations had been passed by the young clergyman with the highest credit. The effect of Harold's success was immediately seen in his being urgently pressed to act as temporary chaplain to a large English congregation during the very severe illness of him to whom the office belonged. Harold had hesitated about accepting the post, being unwilling, even for a few weeks, to give up his own missionary work; but he knew that for those few weeks' service he would be handsomely paid by Government, and money was urgently needed to start a school at Talwandi. "Not one pice shall be appropriated to my own use," Harold had reflected. "My time belongs to the mission; but in procuring help for the school I may be serving my society even more effectually than by my personal efforts." So Harold consented to act as chaplain.

The Rev. Mr. Cunningham's illness lasted longer than had been expected; the weeks were prolonged into months. During this period Harold's clerical duties brought him into close and friendly intercourse with those over whose spiritual interests he had temporary charge. The young missionary was welcomed almost everywhere, but specially in the house of Colonel Graham, an officer on the point of retiring from the Indian service. The colonel had a fair daughter, and Harold, at first almost unconsciously, found that his visits to Graham Lodge were rendering his residence in the city to him very delightful.

There is no need to describe how these visits became more frequent, and how Harold increasingly felt that life would be a blank without Alicia. The young maiden, on her part, thought that she saw in Harold Hartley everything required to make her future life perfectly happy. Alicia, under a playful manner, had deep religious convictions. She loved Harold chiefly because she thought him the highest type of a Christian whom she ever had met with. His sermons refreshed her soul, and seemed to lift her into a higher, purer atmosphere than that which she had hitherto breathed. Alicia was not a worldly girl. She felt that she would rather share the humblest lot with Harold than rank and wealth with any one else.

Mr. Hartley and Robin were not a little startled one day by a letter from Harold asking his father's consent to his suing for the hand of Alicia Graham. He had, as he wrote, already made the lady fully aware that his means were slender. Her father knew his position; there had been no concealment of his circumstances, no attempt to hide the fact that not only toil but something of hardship might be a part of missionary life. Miss Graham had said that she feared neither toil nor hardship.

"I think that Harold must have done the wooing already," observed Robin, "before asking your consent to the suing."

There was something like a smile on the lad's lips as

he spoke, but nothing of the usual mirth in his eyes. Robin was taken by surprise. He had never contemplated Harold's seeking a wife. Perhaps there was a touch of pain in the idea of any one standing in a closer, dearer relationship to his almost worshipped brother than he did himself. But Robin's frank, generous nature was not one to harbour mean jealousy.

"Because I was satisfied with his companionship, there was no reason to suppose that Harold would be satisfied with mine," thought Robin. "I ought to rejoice that a true-hearted girl values my brother as he ought to be valued."

Mr. Hartley did not speak for several minutes. As was usual with him, any emotion that stirred him deeply took the form of silent prayer. He then slowly reread Harold's letter, pausing at every sentence as if to weigh its meaning. The old missionary then folded his thin hands, and said, rather as if speaking to himself than addressing Robin,—

"If He who chose Rebekah for His servant Isaac, and made her willing to share his tent, have chosen this maiden for my son, the union must and will be blessed."

So the suing followed the wooing, and both being successful, the engagement was duly announced to the world. An early day was fixed for the wedding, on account of Colonel Graham's approaching departure. Mr. Hartley and Robin were, of course, requested to be present at the marriage. The elder missionary not only

was unwilling to leave his station without a worker, but he felt his own strength and spirits unequal to such a sudden plunge into society after years of seclusion. Robin, he said, should be his representative upon the joyful occasion.

The weeks that passed before Robin went to Lahore were very busy ones indeed to the youth. It was evident that a separate residence would be absolutely needful for Harold and his bride. Colonel Graham had given a cheque of £100 as a small contribution to the building fund, little thinking how far the trifling sum would be made to go. Mr. Hartley was generous almost to a fault, and at this time had left himself with scarcely a rupee in hand. The first weight of the pecuniary difficulty fell upon Robin, who worked early and late, but who could not, with all his energy, make one rupee do the work of five. Robin, however, worked cheerily, and marvels were performed as long as he remained on the spot; but his absence, as we have seen, caused a sudden suspension of labour. The young amateur architect returned to find that nothing whatever had been accomplished while he had been away, except in the way of a blunder or two, the effects of which he would have to repair.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXOTIC.

As Robin and his father sat at the small dining-table (which the youth himself had made out of a packing-case, painting the rough wood which would not take a polish), conversation flowed freely. Robin, as usual, engrossed the larger share.

“This fowl, if somewhat tough since it was running about an hour ago, is to my mind as good as the turkey, with legs tied up with white satin ribbon, which figured at the wedding breakfast. What a display we had there!—potted tongues, potted beef, hams, creams and jellies, and a huge cake, of course, iced and covered all over with fancy designs; it was such a work of art that it seemed a shame to eat it. The bride’s health was drunk in sparkling champagne. I think that her health would have had a better chance if all the rupees gulped down to do honour to the toast had been kept to give her a better house.”

Mr. Hartley smiled and nodded assent.

“I own that I did grudge the expense,” said Robin, “when I heard the popping of so many corks. I won-

dered, also, what the bride would do with her elegant white satin dress in a jungle like this, with only the kites and crows to see it! If there had been simpler dressing and plainer feeding, we might have had a good third room to the little dwelling, and had the bricks pakka throughout!"

"You seem to have been pleased with your new sister," observed Mr. Hartley; "I care less to hear of the dress than of the wearer."

"I am more than pleased with Alicia. She has one of the sweetest faces that ever I saw, with eyes soft and large like those of a gazelle, yet sometimes sparkling with fun. Alicia's complexion is fair, but a little too pale, except when she flushes, as she did with fright on the first evening after my arrival. She certainly has uncommonly weak nerves."

"What caused her alarm?" asked the father.

"Oh, merely a poor little bat that, attracted by the lights, went noiselessly wheeling and circling around the room. Alicia started, trembled, put up her hands, almost screamed when the creature's shadowy flight brought it within a foot of her head! It was difficult to keep from laughing. Then when the intruder had been expelled, Alicia asked me anxiously whether she would find many snakes at Talwandi. 'Not till the weather is warmer,' said I; 'at present they keep snug in their holes.' Alicia did not look reassured. 'Can you not kill them?' she asked. 'I always do when they come within reach

of my arm,' I replied. 'I'll cut a stick for you to have handy if ever a snake pay you a visit.' You should have seen her look!" continued Robin, laughing at the recollection. "I think that the snakes are in little danger from Alicia's prowess; I doubt whether she would be a match for a baby scorpion."

"I am sorry my new daughter is so timid," observed Mr. Hartley: "such nervousness may cause her distress in a wild place like this—twenty miles from civilized life, and these twenty miles of the roughest of roads."

"I wonder how much of the lady's luggage will survive the jolting and bumping?" said Robin. "Alicia has a number of wedding presents, enough to half furnish a shop. They were all put out to be admired, and they covered three tables and, I think, two chairs besides."

"Where shall we put them?" asked Mr. Hartley.

"A question I've asked myself twenty times, but I have never succeeded in finding an answer. There is a piano, too, which Alicia is to play on, and I am to tune, though I have never tuned one in my life! Some of the presents seemed to me funny. There were three silver fish-knives in satin-lined cases; but where, oh where shall we find the fish?" Robin burst into a merry laugh as he added, "If any one had consulted me as to what would be an acceptable gift, I should have suggested a big kitchen kettle or a dozen good iron spoons."

"You must try the jhil [lake] for fish," said Mr. Hartley.

"One clock (there were two) took my fancy," con-

tinued Robin. "The design on the top was evidently taken from Moore's song about the love-lorn mermaid who was in pity transformed into a harp. There was the siren as the poet described her :—

‘ Her hair, dropping tears from all its bright rings,
Fell over her white arm to make the gold strings.’

I thought, if her lover had been true, and had married the mermaid, how would the lady have enjoyed her new strange life on shore? After floating about serenely on summer seas, how would the mermaid have enjoyed being jolted along in an ekká [a very rough country conveyance], or even being swung from a camel? It would have been a sad change for the poor siren, who would have felt like a fish out of water."

Mr. Hartley saw that his son was not thinking alone of the fabled siren, and he observed with his quiet smile,—“Sad indeed for her to exchange her native element for another quite uncongenial, unless she were gifted with wings to raise her to one higher and purer than either water or earth."

"I think that Alicia has such wings," said Robin more gravely: "she seems to be truly, earnestly pious. Had she not been so, she would never have been Harold's choice. Alicia spoke to me so nicely about helping in mission work. She has begun to read the Bible to her ayah, and has learned by heart all the first part of the parable of the Prodigal Son—in Urdu."

"Good!" was Mr. Hartley's laconic comment.

"Alicia speaks the language like—well, of course *not* like a native, nor very grammatically neither, but very fairly indeed for a lady who has been but one cold season in India, and has had only servants on whom to practise. I daresay that in time she will make herself understood even by zamindars' bibis [wives]. Only I'm afraid she'll have—"

"What?" inquired Mr. Hartley as his son stopped short.

"Headaches," responded Robin.

"Many missionaries have headaches," observed his father, who was now seldom without one.

"Yes; but some can take headaches, and other aches too, as a hunter takes a hedge: it lies in his way; he goes over it or scrambles through it, spurs on, and is in at the death. But not every one is a hunter."

"You think, in short, that our bride has been too delicately nurtured, is of too soft a nature, too sensitive a frame, to bear the rough life which is before her?" said Mr. Hartley.

"I think that we're transplanting an exotic which requires a glass frame," replied Robin; "and we've nothing for it but a hard, rough wall, exposed to rude blasts. But I forget," the youth continued, resuming the cheerful tone which was natural to him, "our sweet exotic will have a fine strong pillar to lean on and cling to; and with the sunshine above and the pure air around her she may—yes, and will—rise higher and higher, till she may smile down on us all."

CHAPTER III.

HAPPY DAYS.

HAROLD allowed himself but a brief honeymoon ; but it was as bright as it was brief, especially to the young wife. The happiness of Alicia was undisturbed by the petty cares which, like mosquitoes in the sunniest hours, occasionally buzzed about her husband. The very anxiety which Harold felt to shield his bride from the slightest annoyance or even inconvenience added considerably to his cares. It was he who had to think about ways and means. The young husband had believed that by economy on himself he had saved enough of rupees to supply every probable want ; but expenses came on which he had not sufficiently reckoned. Both at Colonel Graham's house, after the marriage, and at the bungalow lent by a friend of Alicia, there seemed to be no end to demands for bakhshish (tips). Khitmatgars, khansamars, chankidars, "all the others that end in *ar*," and a great many others that do not, came smiling and salâming, and hailing the young bridegroom as father and mother, and nourisher of the poor, even as flies

gather round honey. It was not in Harold's nature to be stingy, especially at so joyful a time. His stock of money appeared to melt like snow; he would have barely enough, he saw, to cover travelling expenses.

Yet, after all, what were such cares when Alicia was beside him? Sometimes he forgot them altogether. When their conversation was on spiritual subjects, then, most of all, Harold realized what a treasure he had in his wife. At other times the expression of innocent joy and pleasant hopes flowed like a rippling stream from the lips of Alicia.

"We shall have a girls' school, dearest," she said to her husband as she sat with her hand clasped in his; "I have been taken to such nice ones by missionary ladies. I was charmed to see the rows of little girls with shining black eyes, gay chaddars, and such a quantity of glittering jewels. When I have such schools of my own I shall feel like a hen in the midst of her brood of chickens. How delightful, too, it will be to carry happiness into zenanas, to go like a welcome messenger proclaiming to captives that they are free! I do long to see the delight pictured on the dark faces of those who have never before heard the glad tidings! Oh, what a blessed lot is mine!"

Harold met with a smile the smile on the fair young face upturned towards his, yet felt that he must put some sober tints into Alicia's bright picture.

"You must remember, my love," he observed, "that

the work in Talwandi is rather that of clearing and breaking up ground than that of reaping a harvest. You must be prepared for some difficulties in a new station like ours, which has been worked for scarcely a year. When my father was moved to the Panjab he had a new language to learn, and not one of his native helpers beside him. He has had at Talwandi very uphill and rather discouraging work."

"Was not your father grieved to leave his old station and friends?" asked Alicia.

"Much grieved; for there were many converts, most of whom he himself had baptized. But there were circumstances which made the move advisable; and my father, without a murmur, though not without a sigh, gave up his long-cherished hope of spending his last days in his old home and amongst his own people, and being buried in the same grave as my mother."

"I think that it was very hard to send your father away against his will!" exclaimed Alicia.

"Missionaries must have submissive wills, my love, and think nothing hard that is right."

"Oh, it will take me a long time to learn that lesson," cried Alicia. "Papa always let me have my own way—perhaps more than was quite good for me. Do you know," Alicia added in a more lively tone, "when I asked Robin—playfully of course—whether I should not make a capital missionary, he was bear enough to shrug his broad shoulders and say, 'Time will show'?"

"Robin could not flatter to save his life," remarked Harold; "but with all his bluntness you will like him, Alicia. He has the kindest, the truest of hearts."

"Oh, I like him amazingly!" cried the bride. "We were hand and glove from the first—only the glove is not a kid one. Robin will help to make our house the daintiest little home to be found in all the Panjab. I have quantities of pretty things, you know—pictures and beautifully-bound books. We will have a flower-garden too, and creepers all over the house. I mean it to look like a bower."

Harold did not like to speak again of difficulties; he only remarked with a smile, "Missionaries cannot always contrive to have very elegant homes, my Alicia."

"But I know that they have, for I have seen them. Some of the bungalows are quite charming," said the bride.

"Probably in older stations, my love, when it is easier to gather little comforts around one."

"Perhaps one can do without some of the little comforts, darling," said Alicia, "when one has the greatest comfort of all!" Very tender was the bride's tone as she added, "With you every place will be Eden to me."

Harold fondly stroked the small clasped hands which rested so confidently on his knee.

"I do so want to be a help to you—never a hindrance. Do you not think that missionaries' wives, as

well as their husbands, should have the missionary spirit ? ”

“ So strongly do I feel it, my love, that I should think a worker for God a traitor to the good cause if he united himself to one in whom such a spirit is wanting.”

“ Ah, you think better of your poor little wifie than does Master Robin,” said Alicia. “ He copied out for me a song all about the duties of Mission Miss Sahibas. So, like a dutiful little sister, I learned it by heart, and set it to a capital old tune. Would you like to hear it ? I wish that my piano were here ; but it has been sent on with the heavy luggage.”

“ Your voice needs no accompaniment, my love,” said Harold ; “ the nightingale requires no piano.”

Alicia smiled and began, in a very musical tone, a song set to the air of “ The Fine Old English Gentleman.” After the first stanza Harold’s manly voice joined in the chorus, as he beat time with his foot.

MISSION RULES AND REGULATIONS.

The Mission Miss Sahibas must never complain ;
 The Mission Miss Sahibas must temper restrain
 When sust [lazy] pankahwalas won’t pull at the cane ;
 Must never be fanciful, foolish, or vain.

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;
 These are the Mission rules !

The Mission Miss Sahibas must furnish the brain,
 Of two or three languages knowledge obtain,
 When weary and puzzled must “ try, try again,”—
 We cannot learn grammar by legerdemain.

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;
 These are the Mission rules !

The Mission Miss Sahibas should know every lane,
 Climb ladder-like stairs without fearing a sprain ;
 Must rebuke and encourage, exhort and explain ;
 Dark babies should fondle, dark bibis should train.

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;

These are the Mission rules !

Let Mission Miss Sahibas from late hours refrain,
 For they must rise early, and bear a hard strain,
 Like vigorous cart-horses drawing a wain,
 That pull well together when yoked twain and twain.

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;

These are the Mission rules !

“ Just as you and I are yoked together, Harold,” said Alicia, pausing for a merry little laugh.

“ *I* may be a cart-horse, but you are rather like a white fawn,” was Harold’s rejoinder. “ Pray go on with your song ; we have not yet discovered the whole range of the ladies’ duties.”

“ The next verse is a funny one,” observed Alicia : “ I hope that the formidable warning with which it closes is not needed by me.”

The Mission Miss Sahibas in dress must be plain ;
 The Mission Miss Sahibas must work might and main,
 And therefore good nourishment should not disdain,
 Or danger is great of their going insane !

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;

These are the Mission rules !

The Mission Miss Sahibas must topis [sun-hats] retain
 To guard against sun-stroke, to health such a bane ;
 ‘Midst flies and mosquitoes must patient remain ;
 By Mission Miss Sahibas snakes should be slain.

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;

These are the Mission rules !

The Mission Miss Sahibas should sow well the grain,
To bibis and begums [princesses] should love entertain ;
Should smile and should soothe, but not flatter or feign,
And to usefulness thus they may hope to attain.

Oh, listen ye, Miss Sahibas ;
These are the Mission rules !

“ Bravo ! ” cried Harold, as the chorus was concluded ;
“ that is no bad lesson for Miss Sahibas to learn.”

“ Or *Mem* Sahibas either,” said Alicia laughing. “ I suppose that the duties of married and unmarried are much alike, only the Mems may leave the snake-slaying to their lord and masters.”

CHAPTER IV.

INDIAN TRAVELLING.

THE Hartleys soon left their pleasant place of sojourn, and started on their journey towards Talwandi. The piano and large packing-cases had been sent on before by a luggage train ; and Harold had arranged that a big bullock-cart should meet them at the station where the railway-line must be quitted. Nothing could be pleasanter to the young couple than the journey as long as it could be made by train, though, for economy's sake, the carriage which they occupied was second class. The travellers were to descend at the station of Chuanwál, twenty miles from Talwandi. Harold had made every possible arrangement beforehand for the comfort of his young bride. He had secured a *dák-gári* (the Indian substitute for a post-chaise) in which she should accomplish the last part of the journey.

Chuanwál was reached. After helping Alicia down to the platform, and rapidly emptying the carriage of two big rolls of bedding, umbrellas, a hamper, and six or seven other articles which must on no account be left behind, Harold looked for the station-master.

"You have been good enough to lay our *dák*; a carriage is ready, I hope?" said Harold.

"Here is the *munshi*, sir; he will explain," said the station-master, as a stout, dark, sensuous-looking man came forward, book in hand and pencil behind his thick ear, proud of an opportunity of airing his stock of English.

"*Dák* no lay—can't lay. No station *Talwandi* way—*dusri ráh* [other way]. How *Sahib* change horses where no horses be found?" said the *munshi*.

"Well, suppose that we cannot change horses on the journey, one pair of stout animals can easily accomplish twenty miles." The last part of Harold's sentence was half drowned in the shrill scream of the departing train.

The fat *munshi* seemed to see mountains of difficulty in the way. "If horses go *Talwandi*, must come back *Chuanwál*," at last he sagely observed.

"Of course; they will return here to-morrow. The question is, Have you the *gári* [carriage] and horses which I ordered three days ago?"

After a good deal of beating about the bush and cross-questioning, Harold elicited the fact that there was a *gári*, and moreover a pair of horses.

"Then have the horses put in at once. Why were they not ready? The lady is tired of waiting," said Harold, glancing towards Alicia, who was sitting on one of the bundles of bedding.

Orders were given to a man waiting near, who went

off to see about the gári; and the munshi took his pencil from behind his ear. "Sahib must pay beforehand," said the munshi.

"All right. How much have I to pay?" asked young Hartley, drawing from his pocket his bag of rupees.

The munshi surveyed the bag, perhaps making a calculation as to its probable contents, then named a sum that was an exorbitant charge for so short a journey. To pay it would more than drain Harold's bag. The missionary remonstrated, but in vain. The munshi knew that the travellers were in his power. They must pay what he chose to demand, or no dák-gári should start.

"I shall inform the Government official of the extortion," began Harold; but he was not allowed to conclude the sentence.

"No Government dák—private affair," said the munshi, showing a row of white teeth in a smile of triumph. "If Sahib no like pay, Sahib try find ekká."

Harold's first thought was, "So I will;" but when he glanced again at his simply but elegantly dressed wife, he could not bear the idea of her having to climb up into a vehicle so rude, to be jolted over twenty miles of rough road, seated Oriental fashion, and holding the ropes at the side to prevent herself from being jerked out on the road. No, no; Harold would not take his bride home in an ekká.

"Harold, what is all this delay and discussion

about?" asked Alicia, who, weary of waiting, had sauntered up to the side of her husband.

"This fellow is making an unreasonable demand: he asks for more than I have with me," said Harold, looking slightly annoyed.

"Oh, is that all? I'll be your banker," cried Alicia. "Just help me to open my box, and I'll get out the money."

In a few minutes Alicia's pretty purse was in the hand of her husband. The lady was rather amused at the idea of lending to Harold; but he was by no means pleased at having to borrow from his bride. The money was paid, the amount registered in the munshi's greasy book, and in due time the *gári* appeared.

"Is it not like an old bathing-machine?" said Alicia. "It looks hardly as luxurious as one would expect from the cost of its hire."

A *dák-gári* is by no means luxurious, especially on a rough country road. It has neither springs nor windows, and cushions must be improvised from the rugs which travellers carry with them. However, Alicia was perfectly satisfied. "Mission Mem Sahibas must not care for luxury," thought she.

When nearly half the journey had been accomplished, the travellers passed a heavily-laden bullock-cart, slowly jolting on its way.

"There, see! there's our piano and our big cases!" exclaimed Alicia. "I thought that we should find them

all ready unpacked on our arrival at home. We sent on the luggage ages ago."

"There was probably some hitch at the station," said Harold; "and bullocks travel very slowly indeed. But the cart will be in before morning; we shall arrive some hours before it."

Harold was calculating without his host, or rather without his horses. A brief pause was made half-way to Talwandi for the driver to quench his own thirst and that of his horses, and to indulge himself with a pull at his hookah. The pause was unfortunate, for it gave one of the animals time to consider that he had not been taken out of harness and relieved by another horse, as he had a right to expect. The creature resolutely determined—and some Indian horses have resolute wills—not to go a single step further. The driver had resumed his seat on the box, and cracked his whip as a sign to move on; but in vain was whip-cracking or urging or beating. The horse reared and plunged and kicked, and turned almost right round, after the fashion of *nat-kat* (naughty) horses in India.

"O Harold! Harold! what is that dreadful creature doing?" exclaimed Alicia, in terror grasping her husband's arm.

"It is only that we have a *nat-kat* in the shafts," replied Harold. "There will be a regular battle between the will of man and horse, as shown in the picture which we were looking at in the clever book '*Curry and Rice*.'"

“Oh, this is terrible!” cried Alicia, as the horse’s iron hoofs beat a tattoo against the gáři. “There—oh, look!—he has turned round—his head will be in the carriage; he’s as fierce as a tiger! What a frightful noise he makes—between a neigh and a scream!”

“I will get out and help the driver,” said Harold, with his hand on the sliding panel of the gáři, which was but half pushed back.

“Oh no; the horse will kick you or bite you—nat-kat horses bite!” cried Alicia, almost frantic with terror. Stronger nerves than hers have been tried by a nat-kat brute.

Neither could the driver master the furious beast, nor Harold soothe the terrified lady. A quarter of an hour passed—a half-hour; mindless of rein, only irritated by blows, kicking, snorting, backing, now to the right side of the road, then to the left, doing his utmost to overturn the heavy gáři, the nat-kat would go any way but forward.

“O Harold, I can bear this no longer; help me out!” gasped Alicia, looking so pale that her husband feared that she was going to faint. Catching his opportunity, Harold sprang from the gáři, lifted his wife down on the side nearest the quieter horse, and placed the trembling lady at a safe distance from the heels of the plunging nat-kat.

“Harold, I feel so nervous; I will not attempt to get into that carriage again,” faltered Alicia Hartley.

“But we *must* go on, my love ; the driver will at last get the better in the struggle.”

“There is the bullock-cart coming along the road ; we will go in that, the oxen are so quiet. Oh, mercy !”

The nat-kat, half-maddened by the punishment which he was receiving, with distended nostrils and flashing eyes, was indeed attempting to bite as well as to kick. Harold in vain urged that the bullocks would take hours to accomplish the journey, and that the sun was about to set. Alicia declared that to go home slowly was better than not getting home at all. Harold was constrained to let the timid creature have her own way, and the furious horse had his; for while Alicia was with difficulty squeezing herself behind the piano, and Harold trying to arrange the luggage taken from the gáři, the nat-kat and his companion were tearing away at the utmost speed that the weight of the gáři permitted on their way back to Chuanwál station. Mightily amused was the fat munshi when he heard of the adventure, and with great satisfaction he stroked his beard and jingled his bag of rupees.

It was some time before the nervous Alicia, in her most uncomfortable niche in the bullock-cart, could recover her wonted composure. Harold tried to make the best that he could of circumstances, but thought with regret of the despised ekká, in which he might so much more quickly and cheaply, and perhaps more comfortably too, have accomplished a tiresome journey. Poor Alicia

had been so much frightened, and was now so much shaken and tired, that she had difficulty in keeping in her tears. She had a fear that she had displeased, or at least had annoyed, Harold, and that Robin would laugh at her for making so poor a beginning of missionary life. The slow pace of the bullocks made the journey terribly tedious, and dark night closed in long before they had accomplished five miles.

Travelling adventures were not over. A bit of specially bad and boggy road was encountered. First the cart stuck fast in the mud. Harold sprang down, and his exertions, combined with those of the driver and the struggles of the belaboured oxen, at last succeeded in setting the clumsy conveyance in motion again. A few yards further on there was a sudden shock and a crash. One of the big wheels had come off. A great deal of the luggage was precipitated on the miry road.

"Quite a night of adventures!" cried Harold cheerfully, to reassure his young wife and prevent her noticing that a falling box had inflicted on his arm a very severe contusion. He bit his lip with pain, and then added in the same playful tone, "We shall laugh over our little troubles when we reach our destination."

"But when shall we reach it?" exclaimed Alicia; "how far are we now from Talwandi?"

"I should say four miles," replied Harold; "but it is difficult to guess in the darkness, when one can see no landmarks. How we are to proceed with a wheel off is

a difficult problem to solve. If you permit, I will press forward and bring back a lantern and my father's tattu [pony], on which you will ride."

"Oh no ; you must not leave me !" cried Alicia, clinging like a terrified child to her husband's strong arm. "I can walk—I would far rather walk."

And walk she did, all the long weary way over a rough road ; for the four miles proved to be five, and to the young traveller seemed to be ten. Mr. Hartley, after staying up till midnight to welcome the pair, had given them up and retired to rest, when Harold and his tired—almost exhausted—bride reached the little bungalow at last.

CHAPTER V.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

ALICIA'S was rather a cheerless arrival at home. Her old father-in-law was asleep on his charpai (small bedstead), and Robin, overcome by slumber on his arm-chair, was in the midst of a dream, when both were roused by the sound of Harold's familiar voice. Up in a moment sprang Robin, ready to give a warm welcome. After kindly greetings were over, the lad turned hastily away to see what could be done for the comfort of those who had arrived in the middle of a cold February night.

"Oh, this is too bad—the fire out, and the lamp all but burned down!" cried Robin. "That lazy dog Mangal asleep, of course. But I set him the example.—Mangal! Mangal! bring more logs; fill the kettle—no, I'll do that myself.—There is plenty of food in the doli [meat-safe]; we'll have it warmed up in ten minutes. I am so provoked at having gone to sleep; but who would have dreamed of your coming on foot, and at such a late hour?"

The bride was too weary to wait till a fire could be lighted and food prepared. "I will go to my room, please," she faintly said, "and the ayah will bring me my tea." The poor girl forgot at the moment that an ayah's services was one of the luxuries which she was to forego at Talwandi.

"I will act as your ayah," said Harold. "As soon as Robin can coax fire to burn and water to boil, I will bring you your tea."

As he spoke, Mr. Hartley, looking, as Alicia thought, haggard and pale as a ghost, came wrapped in his dressing-gown to welcome his daughter. It was an effort to Alicia to look pleased and happy on her first introduction to her new father; she felt something of awe not unmixed with pity, and wondered whether she could ever venture to be lively in the presence of such a man.

While the servant was preparing the food, Mr. Hartley proposed united thanksgiving and prayer. Alicia expressed her wish to join in it, though she was hardly able to keep her eyes open during the service, brief as it was. She then retired—if it could be called retiring in a place where the accommodation was so cramped that every sound could be heard over the house—and Alicia felt as if she must not only be uncomfortable herself, but make every one else so. The last sound which fell on her drowsy ear was that of Robin starting off with all the coolies whom he could manage to muster at that hour

of the night, to go with him to the place where the bullock-cart had broken down, in order to bring home the luggage.

Alicia did not awake till very late on the following morning—so late that Mr. Hartley had gone to his work hours before ; and Harold, who had a crowd of native visitors to welcome him back, was only waiting to give his wife breakfast before going the round of his station. After his months of absence, the young missionary's work was much in arrears.

“Harold, dear Harold, can we not have a little quiet ?” murmured Alicia. “It is very embarrassing to have such a number of black eyes staring curiously at the new Mem, as if I were some kind of white bear just imported from the North Pole.”

“I will carry them all off with me to the mango grove ; but I must introduce a few of my boys to you first.—Kripá Dé, Bál Singh, make your saláms to the lady.”

They did so respectfully and with natural grace. Alicia was puzzled how to return the politeness, for she had had no intercourse with natives, except her servants.

“I see that your breakfast is just ready, my love,” said Harold. “Call for anything that you want ; Mangal acts as *khitmatgar* [table-servant] as well as cook.”

“But surely you are going to take breakfast with me !” cried Alicia. “I am not to eat alone, and on the first morning here !”

“Forgive me, darling, for hurrying away. I do not

know when I shall be able to overtake all the work which I find before me."

"But you must eat breakfast," began Alicia.

"I took mine hours ago with my father. I only waited to see you, and look after your little comforts. Indeed I must go," continued Harold, vexed to see moisture rising to the eyes of his wife. "I have left my burden too long on the shoulders of others. You know that a missionary's time is not his own;" and in another minute he was off.

"So I am not to have the society of my own husband, or have him always surrounded by natives!" murmured Alicia, as she sat down disconsolately to her solitary meal. "It is rather hard—but no! I must remember Harold's words, that nothing is hard which is right. And missionaries should have submissive wills."

Alicia gave a little sigh. Her eyes were opening to the fact that to be a good wife to a devoted worker like Harold would require some amount of self-denial. Time was already beginning to show to the bride that she needed a great deal of training to be fit for the position which she had lately thought the most enviable in the world. The conclusion at which Alicia arrived, as she rather pensively ate her suji, was that she must in future make her appearance a good deal earlier than ten o'clock in the morning.

"Already my folly and self-will have involved Harold in trouble," Alicia said to herself. "If I had taken his

advice, I should have waited patiently in the gáři till the nat-kat's temper was subdued, and should not have added the weight of ourselves and our luggage to an already overladen cart. Had I behaved like a sensible woman and not like a silly child, the cart might never have stuck in the mud nor the wheel come off."

Alicia glanced around her and above, surveying her new habitation. "Very bare it looks, I must own; no ceiling to hide the rafters; nothing pretty to adorn the walls. This clearly has never been the residence of a woman. I will soon make mine look brighter than this. I am glad that Harold has promised to leave all the decorations to me. Ah, here come our goods at last!" exclaimed Alicia, springing up joyfully from her chair as Robin, himself carrying a large portmanteau, appeared at the head of a band of coolies, who, after the curious native fashion, bore their heavy loads on their heads instead of their backs. "O Robin, I am so glad to see you. Let the men set down their burdens here in the veranda. You will help me, I know, to open the boxes."

Robin was hungry, and would far rather have taken his place at the breakfast-table after a night of toil; but without a word he put down the portmanteau and went off for his tools. Alicia was very eager to have the cases opened, to ascertain that her goods had sustained no injury from the jolting or the fall from the cart. But when the wooden cover of the first large

box was raised, and the tin beneath unsoldered (rather a tedious operation), the examination of the contents, slowly extricated from the hay in which they had been packed, was not very satisfactory to their owner.

"Oh, my clock—my beautiful clock! The siren broken to pieces! I daresay that the works are useless!" exclaimed Alicia.

"I hope not," said Robin cheerily. "I am a bit of a watchmaker, you know. I hope to set the clock going again, though I cannot undertake to patch up the siren. Here, let me help you. That box is too heavy for your little hands."

"It is my medicine-chest, and full of bottles," said Alicia. "Oh," she added in a different tone, "what can have happened? Something inside must have been broken; my hands are all covered with castor-oil! Ugh!"

Not only the fingers of the lady, but a good many things besides, were moistened with oil and full of its odour. Scarcely a bottle had survived the shocks of that journey. Alicia looked aghast when she became aware of the extent of the mischief done.

"Don't worry about it, dear," said her brother-in-law, with rough sympathy. "To have nice things spoilt is a very common experience with us missionaries, so I have often congratulated myself on having so few things to be ruined." Seeing the cloud still on Alicia's face, Robin added more seriously, "You know there is

something in the Bible about taking joyfully the spoiling of goods."

"It is difficult to take it joyfully, but I must try to take it patiently," said Harold's bride. "But where is my beautiful piano? Surely you have not left it behind!"

"One of the oxen is loaded with—with what remains of it," said Robin slowly.

"Oh, surely the piano is not broken! My father's gift! Don't say that it too has come to grief!" cried Alicia.

"Then what am I to say?" replied Robin. "I am sure that I would far rather tell you something pleasant, but one of the big packing-cases fell on the poor piano."

"And smashed it—quite smashed it?" cried Alicia.

Robin gravely nodded his head, then turned a little aside to avoid seeing the tears gathering in Alicia's lovely eyes.

"Perhaps the piano is not past mending," were the first words which she uttered, after a silence of several minutes.

Robin knew that the instrument was quite past repairing; his silence was sufficient reply.

"I suppose that missionaries must not let their hearts cling to anything earthly," thought poor Alicia. "I must gradually learn *to endure hardness like a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. After all," she said aloud, "one

might have worse losses than even that of a new piano."

So the sad face cleared up a little, and Alicia, with a resolution of making the best of what remained to her, turned to the second of her large packing-cases.

"That chiefly contains clothes and linen," she observed, "and a very large roll of wall-paper. Nothing there is likely to have been spoiled. But I can examine nothing in it until I have washed these oily fingers."

"May I suggest your waiting a little before doing any more unpacking," said Robin? "You look tired already, and the first case is not fully explored. From what you say, it appears that there is little or nothing liable to be broken in this second box, so you can leave it for a while. Let these fellows carry both boxes into the bungalow."

"Not into your bungalow, Robin; they would not leave us standing room," said Alicia with decision. "Let everything be put into our empty house"—the lady glanced at the yet scarcely finished bungalow which adjoined the one in whose veranda she now was standing,—“there is space for everything there, and in it I shall gradually unpack all my things.”

"That house, newly built, is damp," expostulated Robin; "you must put nothing into it yet."

"Indeed, but I will," was Alicia's playful retort. "I want my own property in my own home, and it only gives useless trouble to carry it backwards and forwards.

I suspect, Master Robin, that you wish to see the contents, and so you shall, but not till I have arranged them and put them into right order."

"You have been in India so short a time," began Robin; but the wilful girl cut him short with a laugh.

"And so you favour me with the results of your long experience. Oh, grave and reverend signor!" she cried, "I have been a little longer in the world than you have, and won't stand like a meek little girl to hear how, when, and where I should open my boxes. So go to your breakfast, dear Robin. I have been very selfish to keep you from it so long. I am sure that I am much obliged to you for all the trouble which you have taken about my luckless luggage."

As Robin sat at the breakfast-table drinking cold tea and eating colder suji, he heard Alicia, as she stood in her yet uncompleted veranda, ordering the coolies to take away or bring (she constantly confused the two verbs), eking out her slender amount of Urdu with English, and more comprehensible signs, and evidently rather pleased at finding herself in the position of mistress in her own dwelling.

"What father said yesterday was quite right," reflected Robin. "He and I had better go out with our tent for some days itinerating in the district, and leave Harold and Alicia to settle down quietly here. It is quite natural that they should like to be a little together, with no one else near. Of course, the bride,

accustomed to live in a handsome house in a city, finds our quarters uncomfortably small when we are all together. Let her and her husband have the bungalow for a while all to themselves."

So in the course of the day this little matter was settled. Soon after dawn on the following morning, Mr. Hartley and his younger son started on an itinerating tour amongst the surrounding villages. A camel carried their tiny tent, a few wraps, and cooking-vessels. The old missionary rode his pony, and Robin walked. The weather was delightful, as it usually is at that time of the year. Harold and his bride were left in sole possession of the bungalow at Talwandi.

CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE FOES.

ALICIA was up in time to see the travellers off; with her own hands she filled the provision-basket, and helped Robin to pack her father's portmanteau. She was resolved to show herself to be a capable, energetic missionary Mem. All her idle days were over: Alicia had grand designs in her head. She looked so bright, animated, and happy as she bade the travellers good-bye, that Robin, as he walked beside his father's tattü, laughingly observed, "I think that our pretty exotic is taking root already, and promises to climb up bravely. To get so soon over the loss of a piano, the breaking of bottles, and the smashing of porcelain, shows a spirit worthy of Harold's bride."

What was one of the principal causes of Alicia's cheerfulness on that Friday morning may be seen from a letter which she wrote to a sister in England on the following Monday.

"February 28, 1868.

"DEAREST LIZZIE,—I promised to give you a full and particular description of my new home at Talwandi;

but I would rather delay so doing till I have brought some order out of chaos, some beauty out of confusion. Everything is now in the rough. I am going to be so busy, so desperately busy, that I am not at all sorry that my father-in-law and Robin are away on a preaching tour. I want to give them a grand surprise on their return, and a surprise also to my Harold, who is so dreadfully busy all day long with his native boys or his translations that he has no time to consider whether he lives in a palace or a wigwam.

“But first I must tell you what I think of Harold’s father, though I have seen but little of him as yet. Mr. Hartley is tall, but stoops slightly, as if from weakness. He is pale and thin and somewhat wrinkled—less from age, I think, than from toil. Harold has certainly a likeness to his parent; but, oh! I trust that my noble-looking husband, whose form is so erect, whose step so elastic, may never have such a worn-out appearance, such a faint voice, as the veteran worker. I feel a very great respect, almost reverence, for my new father; but he inspires me with something a little like awe. Mr. Hartley is almost too polite, for in the courtesy which he shows to me as a lady he seems half to forget that I am his daughter. I should like him to clap me on the shoulder and call me ‘Pussy,’ as dear papa used to do. Mr. Hartley *will* rise when I enter the room, nor resume his chair until I am seated, though I would often prefer standing or running about. The dear man listens

with such courtesy to what I say that I dare hardly open my lips lest I should utter something silly. Then I feel that Mr. Hartley lives in a sphere so very much higher than my own, that I am humbled and a little constrained by his presence. Perhaps when I know him better this feeling may wear away. At present, my father appears to me something too high and spiritual for earth—like the rainbow which we admire but cannot touch. Yet Robin is as playful as a kitten with his father, who evidently enjoys his fun. Harold regards his parent with much veneration and love. It is beautiful to see the confidence and affection existing between father and sons.

“To quit this subject, I must tell you of the grand work which I started last Friday, almost as soon as the travellers had left us. My Harold knows nothing about it; I only said to him as he went off to the school which he holds (in a mango grove, I believe), ‘Please give Nabi Bakhsh and Mangal strict orders to obey me in whatever I tell them to do.’ ‘I am sure that I may trust my little queen with despotic power,’ replied Harold, smiling. ‘Your subjects shall obey your commands, if you can make them understand them.’

“No sooner had my husband left me than I ordered a big bowl, or rather my basin, full of paste, and flew off to my work in my own little home. Foreseeing, like a prudent housewife, that nothing elegant could be procured at Talwandi, I have brought a quantity of the

loveliest wall-paper that ever I saw—pale lilac ground, as smooth as satin, with a pattern of roses twining over a trellis of gold. Nothing can be more tasteful, or more suited to make ‘Paradise’ (as I have named our little bungalow) a sort of fairy bower. I had Nabi Bakhsh and Mangal to help me in the work of papering my room; for though I have brought a huge brush, I could not do all the pasting myself. I could, however, trust nothing that required common sense to my assistants: for I found Mangal putting my roses upside down; and when I bade Nabi Bakhsh hang my pictures on some brass nails which Robin had fixed in the wall, I saw the drawing representing our church so placed that the tower and trees hung downwards, suspended, as it seemed, from the sky! Of course, it was absurd to begin to hang up pictures before I had papered the room; but I did so because it gave me such pleasure to see them whenever I glanced up from my work. Nor could I resist the pleasure of filling the book-shelves (also Robin’s kind thought) with my very prettiest books.

“How I laboured that day! how I swung my big brush, and dashed the paste over the brick-work! You would have laughed, Lizzie, to have seen your Ailie perched on a ladder, now stopping to look down to direct or scold her assistants, now dabbing paste on the ugly bare wall, which was not graced with even a coating of whitewash. I worked and worked till hands were tired and head was throbbing and eyes aching

from looking up. Then I stopped to admire my rosy bower, and went on again with fresh vigour. I pasted away as long as the light lasted, and then, not wishing Harold to see the work incomplete, I left my huge roll of paper (a good deal lessened in size) on the floor, sent Mangal to look after cooking the dinner, quitted the house, and locked the door behind me. No one should enter 'Paradise' as long as one brick remained uncovered in its bare ugliness in that room.

"I was at first—though dreadfully tired—in high glee when Harold returned. He was tired too, and needed his meal, which Mangal took ages to prepare. It had never occurred to me that the khansamar could not cook while he was pasting. When the food came at last, I took to shivering instead of eating, and my looks awakened alarm in the mind of my tender husband. Harold took my hand; it burned with fever, and I was obliged to confess to a pain in my head. It appeared that I had taken a chill. Harold was uneasy at my having even a touch of Indian fever so soon after my arrival. I was condemned to imprisonment and a strong dose of bitter quinine. Do not be alarmed, dear Lizzie; mine was only a passing attack, and it gave me the luxury (was it selfish to enjoy it?) of more of the company of my beloved. I believe that the school-lads had a holiday on Saturday, for Harold scarcely quitted my side. I was very much better on Sunday; but my dear jailer would not let me quit my room, and gave me

a little English service there. It was a happy, peaceful Sabbath to me. The time when Harold was away holding religious converse with a young Hindu who reads the gospel, I spent in learning a good many verses from the Urdu Bible, which, when I repeated them in the evening, won for me the prized reward of my husband's praise. To-day (Monday) I had hoped to go on with my papering work; but as there happened to be a rough wind, and the fever had left a cold on my chest, Harold bade me keep one day more in the house.

“‘I forgot to ask you for the key of our new bungalow,’ said he; ‘pray give it to me now, for we must keep all the doors open during the daytime, and have a large fire burning within. I had a tree cut down on purpose to have plenty of wood to burn. I ought to have seen to this matter before; but give me the key now, please, my love.’

“Now, for Harold to have had the key would have spoilt the charming surprise which I was preparing for him. This would never do; so I begged my husband not to wait for the key, and I promised to send Nabi Bakhsh to throw open all the doors and pile up roaring fires. Harold went off to his inquirers, and I—shall I confess it to you, Lizzie?—I became so much interested in my studies that I quite forgot my promise. There was no feeling of cold to remind me that fires may be needed, for the days are quite warm, to me even hot, though at night the air becomes fresh. It is now too late to have the doors opened, so I am spending the

twilight, before Harold returns, in writing to you. I shall be too busy to-morrow pasting and papering to do more than add a line to tell of the success of my work.

“Harold is later than usual; he is probably having a religious conversation with Kripá Dé, whom he thinks almost, if not quite, a Christian in heart. I have only seen the lad once or twice, but I am exceedingly struck with his appearance. Kripá is as fair as an English-woman, only the complexion has in it no tinge of colour; it is, I hear, one not uncommon among Kashmiris. Kripá Dé has a delicacy of feature and grace of—There is the step of my Harold! no more writing to-day.

“*Tuesday.*—O Lizzie, I little thought how this long letter was to end,—how my bright fancies, my eagerly pursued occupation, were to bring nothing but disappointment! I have only too much leisure for writing to-day, and must relieve my mortified spirit by telling my troubles to you.

“I was almost impatient for Harold to go out to his work, so eager was I to resume mine. I hurried off to my little house, after calling to Mangal to prepare a fresh supply of paste, and asking Nabi Bakhsh to get some one to bring plenty of logs for a fire (coals are unknown in Talwandi). I knew that I had been imprudent in not having had a fire lighted on Friday, and that I had brought fever on myself and trouble on my husband by neglecting this simple precaution. I will not be so foolish again.

“Well, to go on with my story. I turned the key in the lock of my door, pushed it open, and entered the room where I had left my fancy paper, some on the wall, some on the floor. Yes, I entered with eager step, and then—stood simply aghast. Ugly dark damp-marks had completely marred what I, with such labour, had put up but three days ago; and worse still, my pictures, my choice pictures, were almost completely spoilt. I felt inclined to sit down and cry; but to have given such way to my vexation would have been unworthy of Harold’s wife. It was a comfort, I thought, that the larger portion of the beautiful wall-paper had not yet been put up; *that*, at least, should be kept to be used after the house should have become quite dry. I went up to my large roll (which, you remember, I had left on the brick floor), and saw—oh, how shall I describe what I saw with mingled astonishment and disgust! The paper, with its roses and golden trellis, was, as it were, *alive* with odious little white maggots. It almost sickened me to see them; I could not touch one of the horrid things. I called loudly for Nabi Bakhsh, and when he appeared I could only point to the disgusting mass on the floor. ‘Dimak,’ he said calmly, as if there were nothing astonishing in the sight. Then Nabi Bakhsh walked leisurely to the wall, and knocked down a quantity of branching excrescences of something like mud, in shape a little resembling coral, but of the colour of mire. This, too, was alive with grubs, and again the

Moslem said, 'Dimak.' There is no danger of my ever forgetting that hateful word.

"As I stood almost petrified with this my first introduction to white ants, one of the plagues of India, I was startled by the unexpected entrance of Harold. He had returned for some book, and seeing the door open had walked in.

"Harold asked no questions; he saw at a glance what had happened. 'Call the mihtar [sweeper], and have all this cleared away at once,' he said to Nabi Bakhsh. Then gently taking my hand, my husband led me out into the open veranda. I was too much agitated to be able to speak. I attempted to smile, but failed.

"'I am very sorry to find the white ants in possession already,' said Harold. 'We must fight them in this bungalow, as we have fought them in my father's. Happily a good supply of tar is left; some shall immediately be put round the lower part of the walls, and below the rafters, or the wood-work will become the prey of greedy little foes.'

"'The rafters!' I murmured faintly; 'would the dimak bring down our very roof over our heads?'

"'If we gave them time and opportunity they would do so,' was the not consolatory reply. 'But be assured, my Alicia, that active measures shall be taken at once.'

"And what was the result of these active measures, Lizzie? I have just come in from looking at my poor, certainly misnamed, Paradise. All my pretty paper has

been pulled down and cleared away, and men are putting a funeral band of hideous black all round the upper part of the walls, along the rafters, and a few inches above the floor. There is a bespattering of the tar in unsightly spots even where it is not supposed to be needed. The whole effect is horrible, and my new bungalow smells like an old steamer. I do not know whether to laugh or to cry."

CHAPTER VII.

DIGGING DEEP.

AT sunset Mr. Hartley and Robin unexpectedly returned to Talwandi, the strength of the former having proved unequal to the fatigues of camp-life. The old missionary had hardly been able to keep the saddle.

"Why, Alicia, you must have been ill ! what have you been doing while we were away ?" was Robin's first exclamation, as he took the hand of his sister and looked with affectionate concern at her pale face and drooping appearance.

"Alicia has been a little imprudent," said Harold.

"And has paid dearly for her imprudence," added Alicia with a rather forced smile.

Then followed the story of the invasion of the white ants, and an account of the means taken to prevent its repetition.

"Tar is not enough to keep out the dimaks," said Robin ; "they are the most persevering little workers in the world. Hunt them from one corner, and presently you see their brown tunnels in another ; chase them

from the floor, and they are up in the beams. There is no weapon for fighting the white ants to be compared to a good stout spade. I'll take mine, and go out early to-morrow morning, and see if I cannot find the trace of a colony somewhere near. If I do, then will come the work of sapping and mining. We must follow the enemy to his underground fort, and if possible capture his queen."

"I never saw white ants in Lahore," said Alicia.

"They have rural tastes like myself: they prefer country to town, like those gentry whose music now breaks on the ear."

"Oh, what is that frightful yelling and howling?" exclaimed Alicia in alarm. "I hope, I trust, that this jungly place is not infested by wolves!"

"Merely jackals," said Harold quietly.

"But don't jackals hunt in packs? might they not attack one?" asked Alicia anxiously, as the wild yells came nearer and nearer.

"Jackals are the most cowardly brutes in the world," exclaimed Robin; "they have none of the boldness of the dimak. I doubt whether jackals would attack any human being, except, of course, a baby. Even you, Alicia, might face a jackal."

"I should rather not meet one in the dark, to say nothing of a pack!" cried the lady. "I never before heard such a horrible sound as their yells."

"You will grow accustomed to it," observed Harold.

On the following morning Robin started off with his spade, and did not return for hours. Harold went to his work, and Alicia was left with her father-in-law, who was too poorly to leave the house. Mr. Hartley was for some time occupied with translating, whilst Alicia, seated near him, removed from some of her choice books, as far as she could, traces of the ravages of damp and of white ants. The two were making a study of the veranda, the single sitting-room in the mission bungalow being uncomfortably crowded by Alicia's luggage, which had been removed for the present from her damp house.

After writing for some time, Mr. Hartley glanced up from his desk, and his eyes met those of Alicia, who had also paused in her occupation, after laying down a sadly marred volume of poems.

"I wonder why white ants were created?" she murmured; "they do nothing but mischief in the world."

"They are probably, like briars and thorns, a part of the curse," observed Mr. Hartley, putting away his pen. "But as all things work for good to the servants of the Lord, even white ants may have their mission."

"I cannot imagine what it possibly can be," said Alicia.

"Our small worries, in this life of probation, my child, may be as effectual as great troubles in disciplining the mind, and keeping the soul from resting too much on things of earth. Have you yourself learned nothing from yesterday's disappointment?"

Alicia did not answer the question directly, but, after a pause, said a little bitterly,—

“Was it wrong in me to wish to make my husband’s home look pretty?”

“No, my daughter,” said the missionary very gently; “your object was not in itself wrong, but it was, perhaps, not pursued in quite a right way.”

“I do not understand,” said Alicia.

“I will try to explain myself better. Was my daughter not aware that she was risking the loss of her health by working for many hours in a place exceedingly damp?”

“One cannot be always thinking about health,” said Alicia, with the slightest touch of impatience in her tone.

“Do you not think that our mortal frames belong to the Lord as well as our intellectual powers? Have we a right to injure the instrument given us to be employed in this work?”

“Oh, dear Mr. Hartley, I think that you are hardly the one to give reproof on this subject!” cried Alicia, looking at the wasted form beside her.

“It is because my conscience reproves me as being a defaulter that I am the more able to point out to others the places where my own foot has slipped,” was the meek rejoinder. “I came to India, Alicia, a vigorous, agile man, quite as strong as your Harold is now; you see me, at the age of little more than fifty, an old man,

compassed with infirmities, which, alas! hinder my work."

"But you have worn out your health in the Lord's service, dear father," said Alicia.

"By no means altogether so, my child. I was proud of my agility and strength; I liked to show my powers and my daring; I scorned what I thought womanish precautions; what you said just now was often on my lips—'One cannot always be thinking about health.' Now with something like repentance I look back on useless, perhaps vainglorious exertions, by which I wasted God-given strength. That strength, if *only* employed on God's work, might have made me a vigorous labourer still."

"It is said, *Better wear out than rust out*," observed Alicia.

"That proverb is perfectly true, but it does not quite bear on the subject before us," was the quiet reply. "The choice is not between wearing and rusting, but between careless, wilful neglect of common precautions (perhaps in the pursuit of amusement), and a conscientious reserving of one's strength for daily duties. I have known a missionary bring on sunstroke, because she could not resist the pleasure of gathering flowers in the heat of the day, and could not hold up an umbrella whilst wielding the garden-scissors. Another felt that society did her good by refreshing her spirits after hard work. 'Sitting up late does not mean rising late,' she

observed. So my friend sat up night after night till past eleven, then bravely went to her work at six. Nature could not bear the double strain, and the result was that a valuable missionary had to rest for six months in the Hills, leaving her important station without a single worker."

"Yes, I see that one should attend to the care of health for the sake of others," said Alicia, remembering the anxiety which her own little attack of fever had cost her husband.

"And if you are not weary of an old man's talk," continued her father, "might I ask whether, when pursuing your work so eagerly, you had no idea that you were doing what Harold, had he known of it, would have forbidden?"

Alicia coloured, and assented by silence. After a while, however, she observed, "My husband had never spoken on the subject."

"Affection needs not the spoken command; it divines the will, and obeys it."

"You are rather hard on me, father," said Alicia. "I fear that you will often blame me, if you notice such little things."

"These little things seem to me symbolized by the dimak," observed Mr. Hartley. "Small errors do not startle conscience as do more evident sins, that, like the jackals, give loud warning of their approach. We may be in little danger of defrauding, or lying, or hating;

but the small faults creep noiselessly on us, working, as it were, under ground, yet gradually marring beauty of character and injuring peace of mind."

"To what special faults do you allude?" asked Alicia.

"Want of consideration for others, foolish talking, exaggeration, and discontent; to which I must add another, to which, I grieve to say, I too often give place. This is irritability of temper,—most unbecoming in a Christian."

"I have never seen you show irritability, dear father, except, perhaps, once or twice with the servants."

"Sometimes in the bazaars the blasphemy of the infidel or the insolence of the Moslem makes me speak with unguarded heat."

"Surely such anger is lawful in a missionary defending his Master's cause," said Alicia.

"My daughter, no cause is gained by its advocate losing his temper. I have bitterly repented of words spoken in a moment of irritation."

Here the conversation was suddenly interrupted by Robin's bursting into the veranda, a spade in one hand, and in the other an earthen saucer, which he triumphantly waved aloft.

"After four hours of work, behold the spoils of victory!" he cried, and he handed the saucer to Alicia.

"What are these hideous fat white creatures?" she exclaimed, looking with disgust at three huge grubs, each of the size of her little finger.

"These are the mother-queens of the dimak," said Robin gaily, "which the natives, with a sublime contempt for grammatical rules about gender, call badshahs (kings). Whether kings or queens, they are the source of all the mischief done by white ants; and since these are 'in captive held,' we may get rid of their troublesome subjects."

"What am I to do with the horrid creatures?" said Alicia.

"Put them in spirits, and keep them as curiosities, or trophies, if you like the word better. Now, I must be off, for I have other work to do besides digging;" and with quick step Robin quitted the veranda.

"Robin dug deep," observed Mr. Hartley after a pause; "so he came to the root of the mischief."

"I am sure that you are thinking of something besides white ants," said Alicia. "Perhaps you would suggest that if we dig down deep enough in our consciences we may find out the source of our so-called little sins."

"Can you not divine them?" said Mr. Hartley. "There are many; but to preserve our analogy, let us unearth but three—selfishness, self-righteousness, and self-will. I have traced most of my own errors to one or other of these."

The conversation was not continued. Alicia took away the unsightly creatures, and her father resumed his translation. Mr. Hartley paused, however, ere he

had written half a page. "Was I too hard on the dear child?" he said to himself.

Alicia flung away the queen-ants; she did not care to preserve them. She felt humbled and a little distressed by the conversation which had just taken place. It was a new thing for her to have her faults so closely dealt with, for her good-natured, easy-going father had never been aware that she had any; and Harold, though less blind, was just as indulgent. The brief talk with an experienced Christian had opened Alicia's eyes to the fact that she had a great deal to learn, and a good deal of discipline perhaps to undergo, before her self-will should be dug up, and she should become worthy to be called a missionary's wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST VISIT TO A ZENANA.

ROBIN was very busy during the rest of the week, but the nature of his occupation was kept a profound secret, into which no one was allowed to enter but Harold. On the Monday morning, when the family was partaking of their warm daliya and milk, Harold turned to his wife and said, "You have often told me, my love, that you would like to take a part in mission work here."

"I should like it of all things!" exclaimed Alicia. "You know that I have seen something of the kind of thing already, as I have been with mission ladies into four or five zenanas, and I learned a lesson for future use. You know, darling, that I can read the Bible fairly in Roman Urdu; I have also learned some texts, and I have a famous book of pictures. I have practised my stock of bhajans [native songs] till I begin really to like them, though I thought them so frightful at first."

"How many bhajans can you manage?" asked Robin.

"Why, to tell the truth, only two; but many musical-boxes play no greater number of tunes, and, like a musical-

box, I'll go over and over again. I think that I am ready, at least to make a beginning;" and Alicia glanced with a shy smile at her husband.

Harold met that look with one of affectionate encouragement; he was pleased with the spirit shown by his bride. "I could not let you go to any doubtful place," he observed, "or let you do any really rough work; but I think that I have found an opening for you into a respectable house, where my young wife is not likely to be exposed to any annoyance. Kripá Dé tells me that you would be welcomed by his aunt, a Kashmiri like himself, who would feel honoured by a visit from an English Mem Sahiba. She lives in a kind of fort on the other side of Talwandi."

"I think that I know the place," said Alicia, "for there is only one house that looks in the least like a fort. It is high, and surrounded by walls. I have often longed to pass them and have a peep at the ladies within."

"The ladies within wish to have a peep of you, my love. The family is of high caste. I have made careful inquiries, and I think that in that house you may make your first attempt to begin mission work in Talwandi."

"But how am I to go? We have no gári like the ladies in Lahore and Amritsar, who visited no end of zenanas. Am I to go on foot, or ride father's tattú, with no proper saddle?"

"Robin will, I believe, answer that question for you," replied Harold, with a glance at his brother.

“It is time for me to let my cat out of the bag,” said Robin gaily. “I have given you no wedding present yet, Alicia, for I could not get it ready before. It is bigger than your clock, and is to have its siren—*inside*. It is made to go, and faster than ever a chimney-piece clock could go. It is not intended to strike, and yet strike it may if awkward urchins come in the way. In short—”

“Behold it!” said Harold, as two men, supporting either end of a long pole on their swarthy shoulders, carried a doli into the veranda and set it down.

The party went out to see it.

“This is the Mission Miss Sahiba’s special conveyance,” observed Mr. Hartley. “In places like this where a *gári* is not to be found, or, if available, could hardly be used in the narrow, crowded streets, a doli is a most convenient vehicle.”

Alicia praised her doli as much as she could, though thinking that a big square box had not much of grace or elegance to recommend it. She admired the pink print with which it was covered, and the neat green blinds at the sides. Alicia did not utter aloud the question in her mind, “I wonder how I shall pack myself into my box?”

However, this is an art easily learned, and Alicia soon felt fairly at home in her doli. The men lifted the pole on their shoulders; and Robin, delighted with the success of his work and the thanks which it brought, paced with

long strides beside it as it made its first trial trip. Mr. Hartley and Harold re-entered the bungalow and went to their several occupations.

“Why should I not go at once to the fort, and give Harold a surprise by my promptness in obeying his wishes?” said Alicia to Robin from her doli. “Just bring me my picture-book and Urdu Bible. You will see them on my table. I will make my first call this morning.” Alicia had never forgotten Robin’s answer to her question, “Shall I not make a capital missionary?” and was impatient to show him that his implied doubts were quite unjust.

Robin ran back for the required books. He was highly amused at his pretty sister’s energy, and regarded Alicia’s first essay at zenana-visiting much as he would have regarded a first attempt at skating. To him it was rather a matter for fun.

The lady and Robin proceeded, chatting cheerfully as the doli jogged along, as far as the outer gate of the fort, which was encompassed by a mud wall. The tall building itself was of brick, quite devoid of windows, but with squares of open brick-work so let into the upper part of the house as to give the appearance of perforations, through which the inmates of the zenana, themselves unseen, could peep at the world below.

“It looks rather like a prison,” observed Alicia, “and I see no bell at the gate.”

“We must rattle the chain to give notice of our com-

ing," said Robin, who had just helped to extricate Alicia from her square box.

The rattling was repeated twice, and then the door was opened just widely enough to let two dogs, furiously barking, rush out. The doli-men, called kahars, threatened the animals with their staves; one threw a stone at the fiercer dog, and made him go limping and howling away.

"I don't like this," said Alicia timidly. "Perhaps the dogs may come back, or there may be others inside. Robin, please go in first."

"Go in!" repeated Robin in affected horror. "I would rather venture into a bear's den than into a zenana. It is only open to lady visitors, you know."

"But can't I send in the kahars to see that the way is clear?"

"No; the kahars, being men, must remain outside. See, there are girls within the court-yard peeping curiously at you. They will show you the way to the ladies. You have really nothing to fear."

Alicia, a good deal against her will, had to enter the court-yard alone. The kahars remained outside with the doli, and Robin went back to the bungalow. Brown girls, with a profusion of metal ornaments on their heads and a wondrous number of rings in their ears, called to the English lady to come on. They stood in a doorway at the other side of the court-yard,—a doorway which evidently led to the interior of the large building. As Alicia hesitated, the Hindu girls called more loudly,

giggled and laughed, but did not attempt to approach the lonely stranger.

“How can I possibly cross the yard with that horrible cow and calf and two hideous black buffaloes right in my way?” thought the frightened girl. “I have always been warned not to go near a cow with a calf. I see that the creature is tied, but she looks fierce, and I doubt that there is safe room for me to pass her. What shall I do! what on earth shall I do!”

At last Alicia called out in her best Urdu to the girls, “Send man animals take away,” enforcing her demand by signs; but neither words nor signs had the slightest effect. Whether the Hindus understood the lady is a matter of doubt. They certainly took no measures to obey her; they merely saw that she looked frightened, and her misery rather amused them.

Alicia saw that she must either go back or go on; the latter course she deemed dangerous, the former dreadfully disgraceful.

“I think that there is just room to pass the cow; and as the buffaloes are resting on the ground, I am not so much afraid of them: besides, buffaloes’ horns bend backwards—they do not look made for goring.”

Thus reassured, but anxiously watching the cow, Alicia, carrying her bag of books and white-covered umbrella, made a few steps forward. She was only a little afraid of the recumbent buffaloes, but had never calculated on the great clumsy beasts being afraid of her. It was so,

however. The animals, who had never seen a European before, started simultaneously to their feet.* The terrified girl thought that they were going to make a rush at her, but she gave them no time to make it. Trembling with fright, Alicia fled to the entrance doorway, and through it hurried into her doli, and in an excited voice bade the kahars carry her home. The buffaloes recovered from their unreasonable fright sooner than did the lady.

Alicia, extremely mortified at her failure, left her doli a short distance from her home, hoping to be able to retire into the bungalow unobserved. But, as it happened, all the three missionaries were in the veranda, a consultation on some difficult case having drawn them together.

"Why, Alicia, where have you been?" exclaimed Harold, who thought his bride too young to be wandering about without escort.

"What brings you back so soon?" cried Robin. "I ran home almost all the way, yet have only won the race by a neck. You must have paid the fair, or brown, ladies a very short visit indeed."

"What visit has been paid?" asked Harold.

"I just tried to do what you wished," said Alicia,

* The writer herself so alarmed two yoked oxen by her appearance that, with a violent plunge, they freed themselves from their yoke. At another time, passing on the road a large beast led by a man, its restive appearance made her call out to him, "Is it *nat-kat*?" "No; it is *frightened*!" was the reply.

colouring with shame; "but I found a cow and two big buffaloes in the court-yard, and so—"

"You concluded that 'She who fights and runs away may live to fight another day,'" cried Robin, mirth dancing in his eyes. "Well, Alicia, I don't think that you're quite made for a missionary Mem. When I marry I'll have a bride who goes to church in good strong boots instead of white satin slippers."

"Keep your ill-timed jests to yourself," said Harold sternly, for he saw that his wife was distressed.

Robin's mirth collapsed in a moment. He was not accustomed to receive so sharp a rebuke from his brother. It was his turn to flush very red. "Alicia, forgive my foolish nonsense," he said. "I am always speaking when I should be silent."

Alicia did not reject Robin's offered hand, but, deeply hurt, she made her way in tears into the house.

"How did this happen?" inquired Mr. Hartley.

"Alicia was eager to begin her mission work," was Robin's reply, "and so, walking beside her doli, I took her to the fort. Of course I could not go in."

"I should have preferred having been consulted, and having had prayer with her first," said Harold gravely, and he followed Alicia into the house.

"How wrong in me to forget that!" exclaimed Robin. "Alicia and I were like two foolish, impatient children: neither of us thought of beginning by prayer."

"Can you wonder, my son, that no blessing followed?"

said Mr. Hartley. "Should we ever undertake the Lord's work in a spirit of mere playful adventure? It is possible, even in these days, to lay a presumptuous hand on the holy ark of God."

Later in the day, when Mr. Hartley and Alicia were alone together, the missionary entered on the subject of consecrating all labours for the good of others by prayer.

"If you try zenana-visiting again, my daughter, as I doubt not that you will, I would recommend the habit of prayer both before and after your work. You will need courage, you will need wisdom; love and patience will be required. All are in the treasury of the Lord, and to be had for the asking. Well said the poet, addressing the Giver of all good,—

‘ With us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee.’

And as you speed on your way, my child, it will make your steps lighter and your path brighter if you offer up ‘psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart,’ though the Master alone may hear. It has been well said that hymns are as wings to the soul."

"It was very wrong in forgetting to pray for help," said Alicia; "but was I so very wrong in not exposing myself to danger? You have spoken to me yourself about the duty of taking care of the bodily frames which God has given us."

“As regards not sacrificing health to gratify self-will,” was Mr. Hartley’s reply; “but to serve God faithfully a missionary must encounter some risks.”

“Even that of being gored?” said Alicia.

Mr. Hartley could not repress a gentle smile. “The chance of being gored is so very, very small,” he observed, “that it may fearlessly be encountered. In all my thirty years’ experience I never knew of one European being gored, and scarcely more than four—no, five—that have even been run at by buffalo or bull.”

“I might be a sixth,” observed Alicia. “What protection have I against such an accident, going about, as I must sometimes go, all alone, in a country that seems to swarm with horned cattle?”

“I think that my daughter should find her safeguard in the words, ‘Fear not, for I am with thee.’ God’s grace enables us to reply, ‘I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.’ It should be a missionary’s privilege to fear nothing but sin.”

“I am afraid that I shall never be a good missionary,” sighed Alicia. “Harold should have chosen a stout-hearted, strong-minded wife.”

“Harold is very well contented with his choice,” cried a familiar voice behind her, and a kiss followed the words. “Do not be discouraged, my love, at a little difficulty at the first start. With patience, pains, and prayer you will be a capital missionary yet.”

CHAPTER IX.

TRY AGAIN.

THE following morning, Alicia timidly said to her husband, "If you approve, Harold, I think that I will try again to enter the fort. I have been praying about it."

"That's my brave little bride!" said Harold. "I will make arrangements to prevent your being exposed to any unnecessary alarm or annoyance. Kripá Dé shall meet you at the outer gate, pilot you across the courtyard, and usher you into the presence of the purdah-nishins" (women secluded in their zenanas).

"Is Kripá, who is almost if not quite grown up, allowed to enter the ladies' apartments?"

"Oh yes," was Harold's reply: "lads brought up in zenanas are allowed the freedom of them, even when no longer mere boys. I have heard lady missionaries say that they find their best listeners amongst such youths, especially in those who have received some light from attending a mission school. Kripá Dé's aunt is, I understand, the wife of the principal sircar of the fort; she is, in fact, the greatest lady in Talwandi. If the way

were not made thus straight before you, I should hardly sanction your going at all, young as you are, and inexperienced. Now my great, I may say my sole, hope of reaching the women of Talwandi is through my Alicia."

Mr. Hartley, when leading the family devotions, did not omit offering a special petition for the young wife thus about to commence mission work. He prayed earnestly that her mouth might be opened, and that the Lord might be her strength in weakness, and her stronghold in trouble. Especially did the venerable man pray that being emptied of all self-seeking and self-will, his daughter might be a chosen and sanctified vessel, meet for the Master's use. Alicia felt solemnized as well as strengthened by the prayer.

Both Harold and Robin accompanied the doli as far as the gate of the fort, and lingered near till at the summons of the rattled chain the door was opened by Kripá Dé. His fair, bright young face spoke welcome, and with native courtesy the Kashmiri youth relieved the lady of the weight of her bag. At Kripá's sign the dogs ceased to bark, and the nervous buffaloes that were still in the court-yard showed stolid indifference to everything but their food. The cow was so quietly ruminating that Alicia was ashamed of having ever been afraid of so harmless a creature. Passing through the second doorway, where the Hindu girls had stood, Alicia, with her guide, entered another but smaller yard, where were

a good many noisy, curious children in scanty apparel. This being also passed, Alicia through a third doorway entered the building itself. As the fort was high, the visitor had an idea that she would have to mount a staircase; but entering suddenly almost complete darkness, Alicia was unable at first to see the least indication of steps. In this part of the country staircase-windows were luxuries quite unknown.

"Where is the stair? I can see nothing. Must I turn to the right or the left?" said the young lady, stretching out her hand to feel the brick wall.

"This way," cried Kripá Dé in front; and Alicia could now dimly trace the steps before her. They were steep, narrow, and not in particularly good condition. Alicia had a vague consciousness of plenty of dust below and cobwebs above.

"How strange it is," thought the lady, as she groped her upward way, "that people of high caste and easy means, living in a large, lofty house, should not care for comfort, cleanliness or light. What a marvellous difference Christianity makes even in what only belongs to this world!"

The train of dirty, eager children followed the lady up the stair. Alicia emerged into light, and entered what might be called a gallery, raised above three sides of the smaller yard, with a low parapet over which there was a clear view of all that passed below. Behind this gallery were wooden pillars, some of them prettily

carved, but rather dark with age, and in by no means perfect repair. Behind these pillars were women's apartments, and above them a flat roof. On this roof, and another higher still, women, mostly wearing chaddars (veils), and almost all wearing ornaments, were peeping down at the strangers. The effect was picturesque; for the bibis on the highest perch stood out in bold relief against the background of a clear sky. Alicia found herself the object of a good deal of curiosity amongst the female denizens of the fort. They had never seen an English visitor before.

A native lady, with gold-bordered chaddar, and be-dizened with a good many jewels, courteously received the missionary's wife. Chand Kor was fairer than most of the bibis, but not so fair as her nephew young Kripá Dé. A charpai was dragged out for the lady's accommodation, and in order to show her honour a white cloth was spread upon it. Alicia did not quite know how to dispose of herself on the bedstead, so she sat on it English fashion, with her feet resting on the earthen floor. But from various quarters the cry, "Sit nicely," made her draw up her feet and assume the position which with Orientals is *à la mode*. There is etiquette in zenanas.

Alicia was assailed with a number of questions: a few she understood, a few she guessed at, a few were as utterly unintelligible as if uttered in the Hottentot tongue. The visitor was asked about her father and

mother, the number of her brothers and sisters, how long she had been married, and what salary she received. In the meantime dirty hands were fingering her dress, and curious eyes examining the few ornaments which she wore. Alicia felt puzzled and confused. She looked around for her ally, Kripá Dé; but he was no longer present—he had gone away to his school.

To stop the babel of sounds and the stream of questions, Alicia began to sing one of the two bhajans which she had learned. The effect of this was magical: the hubbub was hushed, the most talkative of the Hindus was for a few minutes silenced.

Alicia then opened her picture-book to give more direct instruction. She had carefully, with her husband's help, prepared her first lesson, which was on the lost sheep. Alicia had learned the parable by heart, and had brought with her three good coloured prints to illustrate it. As a preliminary Alicia said, "What is this?" pointing to the picture of a sheep.

Heads were bent forward, and the picture examined.

"What is this?" repeated Alicia.

"Sher" (tiger), said the first woman who ventured on a reply.

"Hathi" (elephant), suggested another.

A third, equally discriminating, guessed that the picture was that of a *fish*.*

"How will it be possible to get any spiritual ideas

* Such guesses were actually made when A. L. O. E. showed such a print.

into the minds of those who cannot distinguish the commonest objects?" thought Alicia. She forgot that this was probably the first time that the women had looked on the picture of a sheep: their eyes were untrained as well as their minds.

At the exclamations uttered, a young girl, quite as fair as Kripá Dé, turned to have a distant view of the wonderful book round which the bibis were crowding. It was but distant, for the girl did not rise from her place on the floor, near what looked like a round hole. Into this hole the fair creature, and a darker and stronger-looking woman beside her, were pounding away with alternate blows of what appeared to be short wooden clubs. The natives in this manner separate rice from the husk. The laborious occupation had made the young girl's chaddar fall back on her shoulders, revealing a pale but to Alicia singularly interesting face.

"Is not such work too hard for one so young?" said Alicia; for the slight, delicately-formed frame of the girl strongly contrasted with the stout figure and strong thick arms of her companion in labour.

"Premi always beats rice," said Chand Kor, as if that were sufficient reply; and in a sharp tone she bade Premi go on with her work. The pounding, which had been suspended for two minutes, perhaps to rest weary arms, perhaps to give the woman the opportunity of giving a glance at the pictures, was instantly resumed.

"I suppose that Premi is Kripá Dé's sister—she is white also," observed Alicia. The observation met with no denial, though it was evident, from the contrast between the girl's coarse dress and the youth's very elegant attire, that they occupied very different stations in Chand Kor's zenana.

"Why does Premi wear no jewels?" asked Alicia.

"She's a widow," said a rough-featured middle-aged woman, whose fat brown arms were encircled with at least half-a-dozen bracelets.

"A widow—and so young!" exclaimed Alicia. She had often heard of child-marriages; but seeing is a very different thing from hearing. It shocked her to think of the fairest inmate of the zenana being doomed to life-long labour and degradation. The dejected, hopeless expression in eyes which looked as if they might sparkle so brightly under their long dark lashes, awoke in Alicia a sense of compassion. "Is she a relation of yours?" asked Harold's wife of the middle-aged woman.

"She is my father's widow," was the reply.

"You mean your son's!" exclaimed Alicia.

This set the Hindu women laughing; Premi alone looked almost sternly grave. Several of the bibis assured the lady that what Darobti had said was true. Alicia could not doubt that Premi had been married to a man old enough to have been her grandfather, and his death at so ripe an age was visited on his poor young widow as a crime!

"Before the English annexed the Panjab," reflected Alicia, "this helpless victim would probably have been burned alive on the old man's funeral pile. And now she is a drudge—a slave!" The sound of the heavy thuds of the club wielded by Premi's slender hands was painful to the English lady. It was with an effort that Alicia opened her Urdu Bible and attempted to read.

Attempted; for Harold's wife did not, on that first visit, succeed in gaining one attentive listener. She was interrupted ere she had finished two verses by an attendant, who, by Chand Kor's orders, brought her a rupee, and something that looked rather like an ill-shaped cannon-ball made of coarse and very brown sugar.

Alicia had been told beforehand simply to touch the money, should any be offered. Had she put the coin into her pocket, sadly would she have disappointed the offerer of the silver. But the big ball was something different; it was intended to be retained, and Alicia had received no instructions regarding the presentation of gur. She was afraid of giving offence by rejecting the clumsy gift. Alicia wondered whether she were expected to eat the huge lump of brown sugar; but its size and shape made this an impossible feat. All that the lady could do was to take the sticky mass into her hand (thereby sacrificing her glove), and to express her thanks as well as she could by smiles and *saláms*.

Alicia then having come quite to the end of her

Urdu, and feeling that it would be impossible to read, rose from her charpai. Noisy expostulations made her only the more anxious to depart. Again followed by her juvenile escort, the young lady made her way down the dark stair, and was glad when she reached the place outside the fort where her doli was resting on the ground. She was rather encumbered by the gur, in addition to her large bag and umbrella.

“Oh! here is a poor famished wretch, just the person to prize my brown cannon-ball,” said Alicia to herself, as her eyes fell on a disgusting-looking being just about to enter the court-yard—a thin, gaunt man, scantily clothed, his matted hair daubed like his face with ashes, which gave him a ghastly appearance. The man held aloft a pole from which hung a variety of rags, bones, and other unsightly pendants. Half averting her face, with a feeling of mingled repulsion and pity, Alicia held out the gur to the beggar. The man muttered she knew not what, but did not deign to touch what she offered.

On returning home, Alicia did not fail to give to the little missionary party a full account of her visit, ending by telling of the poor wretch disfigured with ashes and clothed in rags.

“Oh, how I wish that we had work-houses or alms-houses here, to which to send such miserable objects!” cried the kind-hearted girl.

“The jogi would not thank you for imprisoning him

in the most comfortable alms-house that ever was built," observed Harold. "The beggar likes his wandering life, and the honour—I may say worship—which he gains from the people, who regard him, as the poor wretch regards himself, almost as a god upon earth."

"O Harold, you are jesting," exclaimed Alicia.

"You have little idea, my daughter, of the length to which superstition can go," observed Mr. Hartley.

"The dirty jogi would have thought himself defiled by taking food from your clean white fingers!" cried Robin. "You thought him a scarecrow; he sets up for a saint."

"I could tell you an extraordinary story," said Mr. Hartley, "and a true one, which I had from my good friend Andrew Gordon of the American Mission. It will show you in a striking manner how pretenders to sanctity impose on the ignorant natives of India.*

"In a large village called Jandran, not long ago, lived twenty-five families of Megs, a caste of weavers. These poor people had begun to feel dissatisfied with their old religion, and to desire clearer light. Whilst in this inquiring state they were visited by a fagir [religious beggar], who resolved to offer himself to them as a guru, or religious teacher.

"'Have you people ever found God?' inquired Maston Singh (such was the fagir's name).

* For this story at fuller length, and many other curious anecdotes, see the late Rev. A. Gordon's interesting work, "Our Indian Mission."

“‘No, we have not found God,’ was the honest reply of the simple weavers.

“‘I am quite sure that you have not,’ said Maston Singh; ‘for God is not to be found in the religion of either Hindus or Mohammedans. But I can reveal him to you; and if I can bring him near to you, even causing your eyes to see him, will you receive and follow me as your guru?’

“‘Most certainly,’ replied Rama, a leader amongst the Megs. ‘It is this very thing that we are all earnestly seeking; this is the great desire of our hearts.’”

“I wish that a Christian missionary had gone to these honest inquirers, instead of a deceitful fagir,” said Alicia.

“The Megs were to hear the truth afterwards,” observed Mr. Hartley; “but not until they had found out that it was not to be learned from a lying fagir.”

“Pray go on with your story, dear father.”

“The poor Megs found that it was no trifling expense to have to support such a guru as Maston Singh. He required daily a pound of meal, two pounds of milk, besides spices, tobacco, and ghee [a kind of preserved butter]. Nay, the greedy guru must fain have a servant besides. However difficult it might be to the poor peasants to supply his numerous wants, they resolved to make such efforts in order to be taught by him true religion.”

“How could the man teach others what he did not know himself?” observed Robin.

“For eighteen long months this guru went on eating and drinking at the weavers’ expense,” continued the narrator, “teaching them to despise both Mohammedanism and the religion of the Hindus.”

“No harm in that,” said Alicia.

“No harm, if Maston Singh had given the true in the place of the false religions,” rejoined her father; “but the wretched deceiver summed up his teaching at last with the blasphemous declaration, ‘Greater than man there is none; whatever there is, therefore, is now before your eyes!’”

“Oh, the wretch!” exclaimed Robin: “did he mean his own miserable self?”

“He did mean himself,” replied Mr. Hartley. “The atheist, not content with the honour accorded to a guru, claimed to be regarded as a being divine.”

“Surely this opened the eyes of the Megs,” said Alicia.

“These poor weavers showed more intelligence than superstitious Hindus usually do,” observed Mr. Hartley. “They did not at once fall down at Maston Singh’s feet and worship him as a god. They said to the impostor, ‘You have indeed dug up Hinduism and Mohammedanism by the roots, but you have not given us one ray of light.’ The honest people thereupon consulted together, and after three days of warm discussion they thus gave Maston Singh their decision in regard to his blasphemous claim:—

“‘We ask you to satisfy us just on one point. You say that there is no being in the universe greater than yourself. Now, if you will give us some proof of your power *to create and give life*, we will be content to follow your teaching. We do not ask you to make a camel, or buffalo, or an elephant, but only a little worm. You can make this of clay ; but make one, be it ever so small, and give it *life*, so that it shall go, and we will believe.’”

“Well done, weaver philosophers!” laughed Robin. “Your proposition was a poser indeed. One would have liked to see the atheist’s face when he was asked to create a worm.”

“The poor weavers’ test was a good one,” remarked Harold,—“the Almighty having reserved the power of giving life to Himself.”

“I hope that the wretched Maston Singh was kicked out of the village by the Megs!” exclaimed Robin.

“No,” replied his father: “deceived and robbed as they had been, the weavers behaved as Christians might have done. Their spokesman thus rebuked the deceiver, who had betrayed their trust and fattened on their bounty: ‘You have said there is no God ; we can never receive this. There is a Creator who made the earth and the heavens.’ Then the weavers, without injuring him, sent the false guru away ; and Maston Singh departed—I hope with sorrow and shame—from those whose simple faith he had vainly tried to destroy.”

“And did no Christian come to tell these dear people the true way to salvation?” exclaimed Alicia.

“The messenger of Satan was followed by the messenger from God,” replied Mr. Hartley. “The gospel was preached with success to the weavers. They learned not only to revere the divine Creator, but to adore the blessed Redeemer, who from the fallen worm—man—could raise the renewed man, indued with life, and that life everlasting.”

“Oh, it is a grand thing to be a missionary, a *real* missionary!” cried Alicia Hartley.

CHAPTER X.

MARRIAGE AND WIDOWHOOD.

“I HEARD the ‘Click, click’ of the hot-weather bird to-day,” observed Robin; “the warm season will burst on us soon.”

“Soon indeed!” exclaimed Alicia, fanning herself as she spoke. “You need not speak of the future; have we not grilling days already? Are you not all driven into this little room because the morning sun makes the veranda like a furnace?—O Harold, surely the heat without and the fires within have made our bungalow habitable now!”

“Scarcely yet, my love,” was Harold’s reply.

Alicia would have laughed at petty discomforts in cooler weather; but with the thermometer making a sudden rise to ninety, with no intention of resting at that point, and with a host of flies and mosquitoes coming out to enjoy the warmth, she felt her power of endurance rather severely tried.

“Oh, these hateful mosquitoes!” exclaimed the young wife, trying, but with indifferent success, to ward off their attacks with her fan.

"I prefer the musquito to the fly," observed Robin, whose face showed numerous signs that the former had not left him in peace. "The vulgar fly comes buzzing about you with apparently no definite object, settles on your pen and drinks the ink, and then makes a dash at your eye. The musquito is a more chivalrous foe: he blows his trumpet as a challenge, and defies you to single combat. He is vigilant and active; so must you be if you wish to bring him down with a blow. You see my hand is now resting perfectly still on my knee: this is a *ruse* to invite an attack. The enemy sees it, and—*there!*" A sharp slap on that hand given by the right one resounded through the room; but the musquito had been too quick even for Robin, and soared aloft unhurt, blowing its horn in triumph. "I'll have him yet," said Robin gaily.

"You make a joke of everything," remarked Alicia.

"It is better to laugh than to cry over tiny troubles," was Robin's cheerful reply. "We missionaries should not want to roll along life's road in an easy carriage, bolstered up, and enclosed in a musquito-net."

"The weather makes my head ache," said Alicia. "Robin, why do you smile?"

It would not have been easy for Robin to have explained the cause of that smile. It was the remembrance of his own prognostications. Alicia, made a little irritable by the heat and insect tormentors, felt somewhat annoyed.

"I will go to the fort," she said, as she rose from her seat; "I have not been there for a week."

"Is not the weather too hot for you?" asked Harold, glancing up from his desk; "the sun has now a good deal of power."

"The sun is hot, but there is at least breathing-space in the fort," said Alicia, who disliked the cramped accommodation of the crowded bungalow.

"I am sorry that I cannot procure for you Kripá Dé's escort to-day," observed Harold.

"I do not want it; I know the way now; I can go by myself," said Alicia. She did not choose to set Robin smiling again at any weakness of hers.

When once in her doli, Alicia repented of the passing peevishness into which she feared that she had been betrayed. "It is a wrong, a mean thing," thought the young wife, "to feel cross because others take small worries more patiently than I do. Robin is right: it is better to laugh than to cry over tiny troubles. A poor missionary I must be, indeed, if my fortitude cannot stand a hot room or the stinging of a musquito. Oh for a calm, firm, quiet spirit!"

Alicia had almost forgotten her headache before she reached the fort. For once the court-yard was clear of cattle, and the dogs seemed to understand that the white visitor was not a bear to be baited; they did not even growl. Alicia, not unmarked but unmolested, made her way up the dark stair to the women's apartments.

Again there was the interchange of saláms, again was the charpai dragged out and spread, again Alicia attempted to read, and again had the young missionary the vexation of being interrupted by irrelevant questions. As a resource from such tiresome and often puzzling inquiries, Alicia again sang that bhajan of which native women never seem to be weary, a chord in their hearts being touched by that verse which may be thus rendered, though its melody suffers by the translation,—

“In this world happiness never can be found ;
It is as water-drops spilt on the ground.”

“These women have hearts, if one could but reach them,” thought Alicia, as she saw tears rise to the eyes of a bibi. “They feel that the world is fleeting and vain. Oh, when shall we persuade them to raise their eyes to another, whose joys will never pass away ! I am like one trying to open an iron door which is locked, and of which I have not the key. Oh, my Lord, do for me what I am unable to do ! Make a clear way for thy feeble, unworthy child, and give her courage to enter and patience to persevere.”

The young widow Premi approached with a fat heavy boy of some two years old sitting astride on her hip, after the Indian fashion of carrying children. The slight frame of the girl seemed unsuited for supporting the weight ; she was looking weary and ill.

“Is Premi, young as she is, the mother of that big

boy?" asked Alicia. The bibis laughed, as they were wont to do on suitable or unsuitable occasions. Several answered at once, and it was with some difficulty that Alicia made out that the fat boy was a grandson of Premi's deceased husband, and the fifth child of Darobti. Indian relationships are extremely puzzling to strangers, not only from the numerous words used to express them (there are at least five species of aunts), but from the custom of disregarding accuracy, and calling those indiscriminately "brothers" and "sisters" who may be cousins in a distant degree.

The fat infant was deposited in the arms of the fat mother, and forthwith began to torture her by dragging at her huge ear-rings—a favourite amusement of native babies, who appear to consider these glittering ornaments as made for their own special diversion. Poor Premi was sent off again to pound rice with the club which she was almost too feeble to wield.

The sound of the thud, thud of that club went to the gentle heart of Alicia. "Premi looks so ill," she observed.

"Only because yesterday was her fast-day," said Jai Dé, an old woman who had but one eye, the other having been lost in small-pox, and who possessed but two teeth, which seemed by their extra size to try to make up for the absence of all the rest.

Alicia did not understand the word for "fast," and it took her some time to make out, partly by means of

signs, that on the preceding day Premi had touched no food, and that she was fasting still.

“What bad thing has she done that you should starve her?” exclaimed the indignant lady.

The Hindus looked surprised at the question, which betrayed such ignorance of what they thought that every one knew or ought to know.

“Premi is a widow: of course she fasts every fortnight,” said Chand Kor; and so, as if tired with conversation on so insignificant a subject, she asked Alicia to sing.

Alicia was in no mood for singing; she rose and made her excuses as well as she could for not lingering longer in the zenana. “The sun is hot; my head pains me,” she said, in reply to the women’s expostulations. The words were true; but it was rather pain in the heart than pain in the head which so shortened Alicia’s visit. Amidst the sound of the jabber of many voices, and a child’s loud roar which reached her as she groped her way down the stair, there came to the lady’s ear that hateful thud, thud which told of the hopeless toil of a weak and helpless slave. Alicia’s soul was full of indignant pity.

“Oh, this cruel, wicked system!” exclaimed Alicia. “How long shall the cry of innocent young victims, doomed to life-long misery, go up to Heaven? Before the English took possession of the Panjab, the probable fate of this fair girl-widow would have been to be

burned alive with the corpse of an old man whom she could never have loved ; but was such a fate worse than that which the young creature must endure for perhaps forty—fifty years,—even more ? It is shameful—it is horrible ! But this one victim may be rescued. I have a plan in my head, and I will speak of it to my husband. I think that the merciful Being who breaks the captives' chains may have sent me to this dark spot to set one prisoner free."

Alicia's mind was absorbed in forming projects as she was carried home in her doli. She found Harold and his father sitting in the veranda, as the sun was no longer pouring his beams from the eastern quarter, and the veranda did not face the south. The season had not yet arrived when it might be needful to close doors and windows to exclude the hot air, and to live in a kind of twilight ; because light is connected with heat. Before fiery June should arrive the new bungalow might be pronounced dry enough to be used by its owners, who would not, however, sleep in it, but aloft on the roof.

"O Harold, I must tell you of what I have seen, and what I have been thinking, and consult you as to what I must do," cried Alicia, as, heated and flushed, she threw herself on the chair which her husband had vacated on her entrance.

Alicia in a hurried way described what she had seen in the fort, Mr. Hartley and Harold listening to her

story with silent attention. Neither of the missionaries was wont to give violent expression to his feelings ; nor was the sad subject of a Hindu widow's wrongs at all a new one to them.

"And now I will tell you what I am set on doing," continued Alicia ; "I mean, of course, if my husband humour his little wife, as he always does. When our Paradise is ready (this sun must have made it as dry as a bone), I mean to bring Premi to live in that nice little convenient room behind my own, which Robin calls my box-room. I do not intend to call her my ayah [a servant], but I will teach her to keep all my things neat, and in her leisure time she shall learn to sew and knit and sing. If Premi turn out in the least bit clever—and there is intelligence in her fine dark eyes—I will teach her to read the Bible. Premi will be sure to become a Christian, and she will be the first woman baptized in Talwandi !" Alicia's face beamed with pleasure as she added, "Is not mine a capital plan ?"

"It would be, were it practicable," said Harold Hartley. He was sorry to throw any shadow of disappointment on the sweet countenance now so bright with hope.

"But where is the difficulty ?" cried Alicia ; "I can see none. Premi has nothing to make her wish to remain in that fort, where probably nobody wishes to keep her."

"And yet," said Mr. Hartley very gravely, "were we

to bring Premi here, we might bring on a serious riot in the district. She, being Kripá Dé's sister, must like himself be of Brahmin caste. The Hindus would combine as one man against us, declaring that the sanctity of their homes was invaded. The Government so shrinks from interfering with social matters, that it would probably afford the poor widow no protection. Premi would be dragged back to the fort, probably be never again seen by a European, and possibly be poisoned by her family on suspicion of having broken her caste."

Alicia turned inquiringly towards her husband, but could gain no hope from his looks.

"I have known three innocent persons arrested and brought into a European court of justice, on the bare charge of having abetted a Hindu widow's attempt to escape from the bondage of which she was tired."*

"Then can nothing be done for poor Premi?" exclaimed Alicia.

"You may do much, my love," replied Harold; "not by freeing the captive, but by giving her that knowledge which is better even than freedom. You can tell Premi of a home beyond the grave, of a place at the Saviour's feet, of the joy which far outweighs even the heaviest afflictions of earth."

Alicia sighed deeply, for she was sorely disappointed by the collapse of her scheme. She could not dispute the opinions of those whose benevolence equalled her

* A fact.

own, and whose experience was so much greater. "I will do what I can," she said submissively; "and as a beginning I will learn the translation of 'Joyful, joyful!' to sing to poor Premi."

The entrance of Kripá Dé, the Kashmiri convert, with Robin gave a new form to the hopes of Alicia.

"If we cannot free Premi, surely her own brother can," cried the young wife. "As Premi seems to be an orphan, he is her natural protector; if Kripá Dé place her under our care, who has a right to object?"

Harold in a few sentences explained to the convert the lady's anxiety to rescue Premi from her present wretched condition. "Would it be impossible for you to bring her here?" he asked in conclusion.

Kripá Dé looked astonished at the question. "Perfectly impossible," was his reply. "I have no power in a matter like this."

Alicia felt provoked at a brother's tamely acquiescing in what she thought tyranny and injustice. "Harold or Robin would not stand with folded hands," thought she, "were a sister treated as a slave." Then she added aloud, "Are you content that poor Premi's whole life is to be passed in nothing but sorrow?"

"She had a happy childhood, Mem Sahiba," replied the Kashmiri. "Often we played together. She made my kites, and proudly watched them rising higher than those of my companions. Often she laughed for joy when I gave her a share of my sweetmeats. Her life

was very different then from what it was after her marriage."

"Did Premi's marriage grieve you?" asked Robin; "or were you too young to care about it?"

"Did I not care!" exclaimed Kripá Dé—"did I not care to have my little playmate taken away, to be given to an old profligate who had had half-a-dozen wives already! Mere boy as I was, I felt that the marriage was something cruel and wicked. When every one else was rejoicing—except the poor child who was crying—my soul was full of anger. I did not care for the fireworks; I would not touch the sweetmeats; I turned away my head, that I might not see the old bridegroom in his glittering dress, mounted on his white horse."

"And did the marriage, mere ceremony as it was, quite separate you from Premi?" asked Robin.

"I was never able to play with her again, though I often saw her in the zenana," replied Kripá Dé; "for she continued to live in the fort. She was kept a great deal more strictly, and it was as if a high wall had been raised between us. I hoped that the child was happy; the women said that she was so, for she had plenty of jewels; but I never heard her laugh again as she did in the days that were gone. I do not think that Premi cared as much for jewels as our women usually do; she preferred chaplets of jasmine flowers. Premi was unlike any one else in the zenana."

"She looks very much unlike the rest, there is so

much more soul in her expression," observed Alicia when Harold had translated to her the words of Kripá Dé.

"One night," pursued the Kashmiri, "terrible news arrived. The bridegroom had had a fit, and fallen down dead. It was not he but his corpse that came back to Talwandi. I heard the wailing and the beating of the breasts in concert which are the signs of Hindu mourning. Darobti wept loudest and beat hardest. She rushed at Premi; she abused her; she struck her; she dragged the bracelets from the widow's arms; she tore the rings from her ears;—she thought that she best honoured a dead father by heaping disgrace on his widow!"

"Did you see this and not protect the innocent girl?" exclaimed Robin fiercely.

"I could do nothing," said Kripá Dé sadly. "Was it not dastur [custom]? Oh that the good God of whom you have told me would sweep all such customs away!"

Mr. Hartley rose from his seat and paced the veranda, with hands clasped and lips moving in scarcely audible prayer: "O Lord, overthrow this Jaggernath of cruel custom which is crushing under its iron wheels hundreds of thousands of innocent victims. Let the lightning of Thy power, or rather let the light of Thy truth, burst forth. Save India's enslaved daughters—the poor child-widows—from bondage worse than death!"

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT A SONG DID.

HAROLD came in late to breakfast on the following morning. He was not unaccompanied, for his hand was resting on the shoulder of Kripá Dé. Whilst the young Kashmiri looked pale and excited, his missionary friend's face wore an expression of thoughtful satisfaction which told of prayers granted and efforts crowned with success.

"We have a guest to share our breakfast to-day, Alicia," he said; "so prepare for him a place and a welcome.—Robin, I am sure that you will make room for our new brother, both at the board and in your heart. Kripá Dé has asked to be baptized, and comes to-day to take the preliminary step of breaking his caste by eating for the first time with Christians."

Mr. Hartley, who had long watched the gradual growth of conviction in the mind of the young Brahmin, held out his hand to the convert. "God bless you, my son," he said; "the day will never come in which you will repent having cast in your lot with the followers of Christ."

Robin heartily embraced the Kashmiri; and Alicia, obeying a glance from Harold, held out to Kripá Dé her small fair hand. The youth kissed it with timid reverence, and then shyly took his place at the table beside Robin Hartley.

The English reader can hardly estimate the significance of so simple an act. The first spoonful of suji which the convert ate at a Christian's table was to him a passing of the Rubicon, a renunciation of all that he had looked upon as the high privileges of his birth; it was a cutting himself off from home and family, a taking up of the cross, the sign of suffering and shame.

"Kripá Dé will remain here to-day," observed Harold, "and at night will sleep on the roof, for we must keep him concealed. After his baptism, which will take place early to-morrow, he must depart at once for Lahore till the first burst of the storm is over. When once it is known in the fort that Kripá Dé has taken the decisive step of baptism, it will be hardly safe for him to remain at Talwandi."

"But Kripá Dé is of an age at which the law lets him choose his own religion," said Robin.

"True, he would not be given up in a court of law, but his age would not protect him from the violence of a mob in a remote corner of a district. Kripá Dé's baptism is sure to cause great excitement amongst the Hindus.—Until that excitement subside," continued

Harold, addressing himself to his wife, "you will have, I fear, to suspend your visits to the fort."

"Give up my only zenana!" exclaimed Alicia, "and just when I have become so much interested in one of its inmates, and have learned 'Joyful, joyful!' in Urdu, on purpose to give her comfort!"

"The poor little widow could hardly receive comfort from that Christian hymn," observed Harold. "If her present existence be like one in a prison, over the future to her hangs a heavy curtain of darkness."

"I might lift it, just a little," said Alicia, "to let one little ray come in."

"To-morrow the news of a baptism will probably cause the door to be closed against you."

"Then let me go to-day," cried Alicia with animation, rising from her seat as she spoke. "I must, I really must, see that sweet fair young Kashmiri again."

"Let her go, Harold, let my brave little sister go!" exclaimed Robin.

Kripá Dé had been watching the discussion with eager eyes, as if he could drink in its import through them. Harold briefly explained to him the lady's wishes, and asked him whether she could safely visit the zenana.

"To-day, not to-morrow," was the reply; "no one in the fort knows that I am here."

"But if the women should question you?" said Harold in English, addressing himself to his wife.

"I am not a bit bound to answer them, even if I

could do so," said Alicia playfully; "for my conversational powers in Urdu will not carry me far into any dangerous subject. I do not know the words for *conversion*, *baptism*, or *breaking caste*. If the women ask me a thousand questions, talking together after *their* fashion, I shall merely look puzzled after *my* fashion, and get out of any difficulty by beginning to sing."

"Let her go!" repeated Robin, laughing. "I only wish that I were small enough to be packed into her bag, that I might see the fun."

Harold, after consulting his father, gave a rather reluctant consent. Utterly fearless regarding himself, he was anxious regarding his wife.

Alicia again, armed with her bag of books, her fan, and her white-covered umbrella, took her seat in her doli, and started for the fort. She really ran but little risk of annoyance, for, as Kripá Dé had said, his relatives did not know whither he had gone. The Kashmiri's determination to declare himself openly a Christian was as yet a secret known but to himself and the Hartleys. It would not be at once noised abroad in Talwandi that he had broken his caste; for Mangal, a Mohammedan, and faithful to his salt, was the only native aware of the fact.

Alicia proceeded towards the fort without anything occurring to cause her the slightest alarm. She saw in the narrow streets the people engaged in their usual occupations. The mochi glanced up for a moment as the doli was carried along, then went on with his

delicate work of making slippers adorned with thread of gold. The clang of the blacksmith's hammer was not interrupted, and the sweetmeat-seller, behind his little pile of *metai*, looked as unconcerned as if the passing of a *doli* were a thing too ordinary to be noticed. Alicia, to her comfort, saw no sign of any approaching tempest; nor did the lady meet with any inconvenience save from the troops of thin, overladen donkeys which sometimes obstructed the way, notwithstanding the loud warning "Bach!" (Save thyself!) with which the *kahars* tried to clear a passage for the *doli*.

The fort was soon reached. There, also, the first feeling of curiosity had passed away. A smaller crowd of dirty, bare-footed children greeted Alicia with loud, shrill cries of "Mem! Mem!" and when the upper terrace was reached, only two or three *bibis* made their appearance. To Alicia's disappointment *Premi* was not amongst them. So little interest was shown in the lady, that Alicia resolved not to visit a *zenana* again on consecutive days. The *bibis'* stock of questions had been exhausted, half of them had been misunderstood or unanswered; the white lady's dress was the same which she had worn on preceding days, and she was not likely to have anything to communicate but what the Hindus did not care to hear. Sometimes disappointment is experienced by workers when the hearers who crowded round them on their first appearance dwindle away as visits are repeated.

"How different is zenana-visiting from what I had pictured it to be!" thought Alicia, as she saw the women eagerly examining some new purchase which had cost a few coppers, as if it were an object of interest too absorbing to leave any room for care about the soul. "I feel as if I were trying with a small penknife to carve a statue out of granite. It seems hopeless to try to make an impression. Is it possible to make these poor heathen think of anything beyond the trifles of the day?" Alicia showed a few pictures to the children, who were somewhat more attentive than their elders, and she tried to betray no impatience when little brown fingers, just taken from a mouth half-stuffed with metal (sweets), scrabbled dirty marks on her book.

Then Alicia bethought herself of her new song—that might help her to gain some attention. Clear rose her voice in the translation of "Here we suffer grief and pain," in which the cheerful tone of the melody belies the sadness of the first line. But when Alicia had begun the well-known refrain, which was, of course, in Urdu, to her astonishment a clear "Joyful, joyful, joyful!" in unmistakable English, rang from the upper roof. Alicia, startled, raised her eyes, and saw for a moment, clear against the blue sky, the unveiled head of Premi in the act of eager listening. A most un-Oriental flush was on her cheeks, a bright but bewildered expression in her eyes, as if she listened to some song from dream-land and joined in it by some irresistible impulse. In

a moment the voice was silent, the head withdrawn, and Alicia remained gazing upwards, listening and wondering, asking herself whether both her senses could have at once deceived her. Then she turned to the nearest Hindu, who chanced to be Darobti, standing with her fat little boy on her hip.

“Does Premi know English?” asked Alicia eagerly.

Darobti at first did not appear to hear the question, nor to understand it when she did hear. When Alicia had repeated her inquiry five or six times, it only elicited the reply, “Premi knows nothing; Premi grinds corn.” Saying this, Darobti turned away, and sauntered off to another part of the building.

Was it to teach that song to the children that Alicia sang it again and again, until little lips began to catch the refrain? If such were her only object, why were the Englishwoman’s eyes so constantly wandering from her auditors in the direction of that lofty terraced roof? Alicia sang in English as well as Urdu. She lingered in the fort longer than she would otherwise have done, in hopes of catching a sight of Premi’s face, with the rosy blush upon it. Alicia was disappointed in her hope, and at last quitted the gallery over the court, where she had now no auditors but the children. As she descended the dark staircase, Alicia almost expected to hear Premi’s step behind her. As Harold’s wife was crossing the inner court-yard she again paused to look up and listen for that “Joyful, joyful!” from above. She

heard only the laugh of the children and the snort of a buffalo in the outer yard.

All the way back to the bungalow Alicia could think of nothing but the incident which had occurred. She was so eager to tell of it that it was a real disappointment to her to find nobody in the veranda, and the bungalow empty. It is one of the trials of the first year of mission life to feel idle when others are busy, lonely because companions are out at work. There is the uncomfortable sensation of being like a drone in the hive. The remedy is study of the language; but Alicia felt too unsettled and impatient to sit down to grammar, and struggle with strange idioms and incomprehensible combinations of verbs. She sat fanning herself, glancing up at the clock every two minutes, and wishing for Harold's return. The striking of that clock—for Robin had succeeded in setting it going—was the first thing to rouse Alicia from her dreamy, indolent mood.

"It would be far better if, instead of wasting my time thus, I spent more of it on my knees," thought Alicia. "A baptism is to take place to-morrow, the first baptism in Talwandi, and I have never yet in my private prayers remembered the youth over whom my Harold is rejoicing with trembling. I have not prayed earnestly, and as one who believes in the power of prayer, for poor Premi. I am neglecting one of the best means of helping those who toil in the mission field, whilst grieving that I can do in it next to nothing. I am thinking what I

may accomplish when I can speak to natives in their Urdu tongue, and care too little to pour out to God my heart's desires in my own. Lord, forgive my selfish neglect, and shed on Thy feeble child more of the spirit of prayer, specially of intercessory prayer!"

The tediousness of Alicia's waiting-time was over; one by one there rose before her mind the names of those for whom she ought to plead. Not only did she pray for her nearest and dearest—they had not been forgotten in her early prayer—but for servants, kahars, all who came within reach of her own or her husband's influence. With Kripá Dé's name came that of his youthful widowed sister; then Alicia pleaded for the poor ignorant bibis of Talwandi, and the little ignorant children. Harold's young wife was surprised to find how large a circle might be enclosed by the prayer of one who was but standing, as it were, at the open gate of the harvest-field which she as yet felt herself scarcely worthy to enter.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING SUSPICION.

MR. HARTLEY and Robin returned soon after Alicia, with a spirit refreshed and strengthened, had risen from her knees. The elder missionary looked so much heated and wearied that his daughter's first care was to bring him a cool, refreshing draught. Then Alicia told of her visit to Chand Kor's zenana, and of the strange effect of a little hymn.

"And Premi looked a different being," continued Alicia, "with that colour on her cheek and that light in her eyes. It almost seemed as if the English word 'joyful' had transformed her into one of ourselves. She was not like a Hindu at all."

"You probably mistook the word sung by the young Kashmiri," observed Mr. Hartley, who knew how easily the ear is deceived when something is spoken in a foreign tongue. He tried to recall some Urdu or Kashmiri word which might be mistaken for "joyful," but none such came to his mind.

Robin looked full of animation ; his eyes told, before

his lips spoke, that a new thought had flashed on his brain. "Is it not possible," he cried, "that some European child, whom all supposed to have been murdered at the Mutiny time, may have been spared to endure the worse fate of being buried in a zenana?"

"Oh, what an idea!" exclaimed Alicia, clasping her hands and turning sparkling eyes on Robin. "My own uncle and aunt and their two little girls were killed in the Mutiny, more than eleven years ago—at least we always thought so."

"At what place?" inquired Mr. Hartley.

Alicia mentioned a distant city.

"That is very far away—not in the limits of the Panjab. And one thing is evident," continued the missionary—"Kripá Dé is undoubtedly a Kashmiri Brahmin, so no sister of his could be English."

Alicia looked disappointed; but Robin said quickly, "Are you sure that the widow *is* Kripá Dé's sister?"

"I think that the bibis said so," answered Alicia.

"Oh, but you might not have understood the bibis; or the bibis might not have understood you; or—but here comes Kripá Dé himself with Harold. Let's have the real truth from his lips.—Kripá Dé," he continued, addressing the convert, "are you and Premi the children of one mother?"

"No," replied the youth. "Premi was only my little playmate when she was a child."

The negative reply made Alicia's heart beat fast with

excitement. "Oh, question him more closely!" she exclaimed, feeling more distressed than she had ever done before at her knowledge of Urdu being so imperfect.

Mr. Hartley's interest was thoroughly aroused. "Was Premi always in the fort?" he inquired of Kripá Dé; "or can you remember her first arrival?"

"I remember Premi being brought in one night," said Kripá Dé; he spoke slowly, like one trying to recall impressions of the distant past. "She was then quite a little girl, some years younger than myself. I recollect that the bibis crowded around her, and that Darobti jested me about the child's skin being as white as my own."

"She said that you were like brother and sister?" suggested Robin.

Kripá Dé shook his head and looked embarrassed; which made the questioner shrewdly guess that Darobti had joked the boy on the coming of a little white bride for a little white bridegroom. Marriage, even of infants, forms a large subject of interest in the Indian zenana.

Harold, who had been briefly informed by Alicia of what had occurred, now took the place of catechiser.

"How many years have elapsed since the child was brought to Talwandi?" he asked.

"Who knows?" was the reply. Native children keep little count of time.

"Have you no sort of idea? Think again."

"I was just tall enough then to see over the wall. It seems a great many years ago."

"Perhaps ten or twelve?" suggested Robin. "You know that you are now eighteen. Have you no sort of guess how old you were then?"

"Perhaps seven or eight," replied Kripá Dé.

Harold translated each question and answer to his eager young wife.

"Did those who brought the child not explain how she came to be in their hands?" inquired Mr. Hartley.

"I cannot recollect; I never heard. It has sometimes been said in the zenana that Premi was brought from Kabul; that she is white as being the child of Pathans. I never considered the matter at all."

"Ask how the little one was dressed when she arrived," said Alicia eagerly.

Kripá raised his hand to his brow and reflected. "I think that the child had a shawl wrapped round her, and—yes—yes—one white thing like what the English wear on their feet!" cried Kripá Dé. "I remember that; for the bibis laughed, and fitted it on their hands. We had never seen such a thing before. But why do you question me thus?" the young Brahmin suddenly asked.

"Because we suspect it to be possible that Premi is neither Kashmiri nor Pathan," said Harold, "but the child of English parents."

Kripá Dé's countenance, with various expressions flitting rapidly across it, was a study to those who watched it. Surprise, perplexity, now pleasure, now pain, succeeded each other on it, leaving at the end one look of anxious hope as he asked, "If Premi were English, would she be *free*?"

"Certainly," replied every voice; and Harold added, "No English girl could be kept in confinement; the Government would claim her, and heavy punishment would fall on any one who dared to attempt to detain her."

"But the difficulty would be to prove that she is English," observed Mr. Hartley. Addressing himself to Kripá Dé, he inquired whether the zenana child had ever talked of other scenes or of other people.

"Never," was the Kashmiri's reply—"at least I never heard of her doing so."

"There was nothing to awake a suspicion in your mind that Premi was connected with Europeans? Did she talk just like those around her?"

Kripá Dé, pressing his hand over his forehead, made strong efforts to revive any faint impression left on the sands of his memory, but could not at first discover any. "If Premi's language had at first been strange," he observed, "I would only have thought that she was speaking in Pushtoo" (the language of the Afghans).

"My father, are you aware that the commissioner is now on circuit?" said Harold. "I accidentally heard

to-day that Mr. Thole is encamped at Patwal, only six miles from this place; but he may possibly have moved on. Would it not be well to lay the whole matter before him, and procure from him a warrant for the production in court of a young widow suspected to be of English birth? If our suspicions be correct, other proofs would probably come out if the matter were thoroughly sifted by a Government official."

It was now Kripá Dé's turn to need an interpreter, and his eyes were anxiously turned towards Robin.

"I think that we should not lose a day in consulting Mr. Thole," was Mr. Hartley's reply. "I have a slight, a very slight, acquaintance with the commissioner; he knows who I am, and he will, I hope, give me audience at once.—Robin, give orders for the tattú to be saddled without delay."

"Not, I trust, before you have taken your meal," said Alicia pleadingly. "O father, you need rest and refreshment so much!"

"Why not let Robin and myself go, and you remain here?" suggested Harold. "You have already exerted yourself beyond your strength."

Mr. Hartley would not hear of this arrangement. He knew the character of Mr. Thole, and that he would be far more likely to listen to an elderly man, of whom he had seen something, than to two young missionaries who were to him utter strangers. Mr. Hartley felt that the matter might need delicate handling. Mr. Thole was

one of those Government officers who pride themselves on being strictly just. The commissioner could not endure the imputation of favouring a countryman, above all if that countryman happened to be engaged in mission work, with which Mr. Thole had not the slightest sympathy. The official's justice, like ambition, thus sometimes overleaped itself, and fell on the other side ; and Mr. Thole actually showed no small tendency to partiality, from the very dread of being considered partial. Mr. Thole looked upon evangelistic efforts as a waste of money, if not an actual means of disturbing the public peace. To the commissioner it was a matter of indifference whether India were Hindu, Mohammedan, or Christian ; but he was very anxious to do his duty to Government, very desirous that his district should be regarded as the most quiet and prosperous in the land. Mr. Hartley knew that to bring his frank, impetuous, and not always discreet Robin into contact with a calm, cold man of the world might utterly defeat his own desire to make Mr. Thole act in a delicate, difficult matter. The missionary therefore decided that Harold and himself should go in search of Mr. Thole, and lay before him the case of Premi. The only point conceded was that the expedition should be postponed to a later hour in the day. Six miles was a short distance, and Patwal could easily be reached before sunset. After a brief rest, Mr. Hartley on his tatttu and Harold on foot were on their way to the commissioner's encampment,

to seek his aid in instituting inquiries regarding the nationality of Premi. Without the weight of his authority, it would be impossible to make inquiries at all.

After watching from the veranda the departure of Mr. Hartley and her husband, Alicia, accompanied by Robin, returned to the room in which they had left the Kashmiri. Kripá Dé was not to venture out of the house, lest he should be seen by any one who might betray to his family the secret of his being amongst Christians. Alicia was struck by the anxious, thoughtful expression on the convert's fair young face. He was seated on the floor, with his hand pressed over his eyes.

"What are you thinking of, Kripá Dé?" asked Robin, taking his place on the mat beside him, so as to be on a friendly level with his companion.

"I am trying to recollect more about Premi and the days that are past," was the reply. "I remember that the little child cried and called for her mother, and that I tried to quiet her with bits of sugar-cane; but I supposed that the dead mother was a Pathan. There is a woman in the fort who could, I feel sure, tell a great deal more about Premi than I am able to do. Has the Mem noticed an old bibi with one eye who goes about in the zenana?"

Robin translated the question to Alicia, who replied, "I remember well an old woman with one blind eye: she is always talking; she interrupted me every minute."

"That bibi was the first to carry in the white little girl," observed Kripá Dé. "That Jai Dé has said strange things about Premi; they are coming back to my mind. Were she questioned, I am certain that she could tell a good deal more."

"What things has she said?" asked Robin.

"I have heard her remark, more than once, that it was unlucky to bring into the fort a child of blood. I supposed from that word that Premi's father had been probably killed in some feud; but with the Pathans that is a thing too common to attract much notice. Jai Dé has also said that it must have been to keep off some bhut [demon] that a black charm had been hung round the little girl's neck."

"A black charm!" exclaimed Alicia eagerly, after the words had been translated. "Can she have meant a black locket?"

"Likely enough. But what makes this strike you so much?"

"After my grandmother's death," said Alicia, "her husband gave a black memorial locket to each of her female descendants. There were seven purchased; two went to my cousins in India, and I have another. The seven were exactly of the same pattern, with a little inscription, initials, and a date. If Premi had a locket like mine, I should feel perfectly certain that she is my cousin."

Robin, eager as Alicia herself, closely questioned the

Kashmiri. But the youth could only reply on the authority of Jai Dé that the charm worn by Premi was black; he had never himself seen it. "But I will try to see it, if it has not been thrown away," he cried, rising hastily from the ground. "I will get from Jai Dé all that she knows; I will go back at once to the fort."

"Stop, madman!" cried Robin, who had sprung to his feet, and who now laid a strong grasp on the convert's shoulder. "If you go back now, we shall never set eyes on you again. Where does your family suppose you to be at this moment?"

"On a pilgrimage to the shrine of Máta Devi at Rangipur," replied the Kashmiri. "I am not expected back at the fort till to-morrow at sunset."

"I hope that you did not tell your people that you were going on pilgrimage?" observed Robin gravely.

"Of course I did, or I could not have got away," replied the convert, without any appearance of shame.

"It was a lie," said Robin bluntly. "I am sure that my brother did not know that you had told one, or he would never have consented to your being baptized to-morrow."

Then indeed a flush rose to the Kashmiri's pale cheek, and he looked perplexed and troubled. Kripá Dé had indeed received the Christian faith in all sincerity; but brought up as he had been in an atmosphere of falsehood, he could hardly be expected to have that abhor-

rence of a sin which he hardly recognized to be one which was a characteristic of the English youth. Robin translated Kripá Dé's words to Alicia, who was more indulgent to the weakness of the convert.

"Do you not think," she observed, "that in some cases it may be pardonable to deceive, such as this, for instance, where life itself may be at stake, or the safety of a soul?"

"Surely such deceit comes from want of faith," replied Robin. "Can we believe that He who created the universe, and called the dead from their graves, cannot save bodies or souls without our trying to help Him by breaking His laws?"

"But what is to be done now?" cried Alicia, looking distressed. "It is of such importance for us to gain information regarding Premi, and only Kripá Dé can procure it. What is to be done?" she repeated more earnestly, as Robin gave no immediate reply.

"Kripá Dé must *not* go back to the fort," replied Robin with decision. "If he go, he will assuredly be questioned; he may even be asked whether he has eaten with us and broken his caste. Caste is all nonsense to us; but to Hindus, and specially Brahmins, to eat with Christians is a far worse crime than slandering or stealing. If Kripá Dé be thus questioned, he will be tempted to lie; and if he do not lie—"

"He will be imprisoned, perhaps murdered," cried Alicia.

"Likely enough," was the rejoinder. "So we must keep him under our eye."

"And poor Premi, what is to become of her?"

"Do you not think that the Lord cares for the poor young widow at least as much as we do?" said Robin. "My father has gone to try to procure a Government warrant for Premi to be produced in court. All that we can do, at least so it seems to me now, is for us to pray that he may succeed."

Very earnest prayer was offered, both in English and in Urdu—in the latter for the sake of Kripá Dé, who could not otherwise have joined in or have understood the petitions offered up.

In the evening, when alone with the convert, Robin tried to impress on Kripá Dé the necessity under which every real Christian lies to speak the truth always, and to fear nothing but sin.

"If you do not hate falsehood," said the young evangelist, "where is the proof that you love Him who is the Truth as well as the Life?"

"Did I not give proof of my love for Christ," replied the Kashmiri, "when for His sake I threw away my Brahminical thread?"

Robin was not yet sufficiently versed in Hindu customs to understand the full force of this simple appeal. "Was it then such an overwhelming trial to part with a thread?" he inquired.

Kripá Dé looked as much surprised at the question

as a king might be if asked whether it would be a trial to part with his crown. Then the young Brahmin told the strange story of his own early life. He described the mysterious ceremony with which he had been invested with the Brahminical thread, revealing to his listener some of the strange force of that superstition which helps to choke spiritual life among the Hindus.

"Immediately after the solemn act of putting the Brahminical sign round my neck," said the youthful convert, "I was confined for three days in a closed room, and was not allowed to have intercourse with any one but my grandmother. She has since died, and her ashes, collected from the funeral pile, have been carried hundreds of miles to be thrown into the Ganges."

"Tell me more about your three days of seclusion," said Robin.

"During those three days in which I remained shut up my grandmother was my teacher. She reminded me of my new duties, and told me what honour I must claim from the lower orders simply on account of my being a Brahmin. Through her teaching my vanity increased: I thought in my pride that I was in possession of divine power, and could destroy any one who should dare to stand against me simply by the breath of my mouth."

"Could you believe such a tremendous falsehood?" exclaimed Robin Hartley.

"I did believe it," was the reply, "and I resolved to use my power. Immediately after my release, I thought of trying an experiment on one of my playmates who belonged to the Kayasta caste, a boy with whom I was not always on good terms. So after I was set free to walk about the village and join my former companions, one of the first things which I did was to pick a quarrel with the boy whom I wanted to destroy."

"Kripá Dé, were you ever such a fiend?" burst from the lips of the astonished listener.*

"I was a Brahmin," said Kripá Dé, as if that were sufficient reply.

"Pray go on with your story," said Robin.

"In the quarrel I gave the boy two or three severe blows, and then warned him not to touch me, as I had now the power of reducing him to ashes. Notwithstanding my warning, he gave back as many hard knocks as he had received. I tried in vain to destroy him by the breath of my mouth; and at last threw my sacred thread at his feet, expecting to see him consumed by fire."

"And you were disappointed to find that your thread had no power to work such a horrible miracle!" observed Robin.

"I was so bitterly disappointed that I ran crying to

* This strange story is no invention of my own imagination; it is the relation of what he himself did, copied almost verbatim from an address by T. K. Chatterji, a talented Christian native gentleman, who had once been a Brahmin. Here indeed truth is stranger than fiction!

my grandmother to tell her what had happened. The result was a great quarrel between her and my playmate's mother, who resented my attempt to burn up her son. Other women joined in the dispute, and the noise and wrangling lasted for more than an hour. All that I had at last was a rebuke, not for wishing to kill my companion, but for parting with my Brahminical thread, which was soon replaced by another."

This extraordinary revelation of what the spirit of Brahminism is made a strong impression on Robin. It was a glimpse of the features of the demon with whom the young knight of the Cross was to combat till death should end the struggle. Robin repeated the story of Kripá Dé to Alicia that evening.

"I can hardly believe that one who looks so gentle, so mild, could ever have been possessed by such demons of pride, hatred, and malice," she exclaimed.

"The Master has cast out the demons," observed Robin, "and the convert is now sitting at the Lord's feet, clothed and in his right mind. What a miracle of grace is a proud Brahmin's conversion!"

The return of Mr. Hartley and Harold was watched for eagerly by the little group in the mission home. Many a time Robin quitted the bungalow to look down the road and watch for his father's return. The last gleam of light faded from the sky, the stars shone out, but the missionaries had not returned. Kripá Dé was sent to sleep on the roof; but Alicia and Robin sat up

watching, growing more and more impatient as hour after hour passed on. At last their uncertainty was ended by the return of the sais (groom) who had accompanied Mr. Hartley. The man brought a note from Harold. What information it contained will be given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT IN CAMP.

MR. HARTLEY and his son proceeded on their way towards Patwal, the slow pace of the tattu allowing them to converse together, as Harold walked beside his father, the sais following behind on foot. The conversation was chiefly on subjects connected with mission work.

After a while Patwal was reached. Between the stems of trees in a thick mango tope white tents were seen, on which the golden rays of the sun about to set cast a rich warm glow. At a short distance the camels which had carried tents and luggage were tethered, some crouching on the ground, some browsing on the lower branches of trees. Turbaned servants were moving hither and thither. Extemporized fire-places in the open air, from whose neighbourhood sundry savoury scents proceeded, showed that the Sahib's dinner was in course of preparation. Mr. Hartley dismounted and gave his card to one of the attendants, to be taken to the Commissioner Sahib. After a short delay the servant returned with his master's saláms, the Oriental formula of admitting a guest.

As the Hartleys approached the large, square, flat-roofed tent of Mr. Thole, they heard the commissioner's voice from within give the order to lay dinner for three. India is the land of hospitality; even had Mr. Thole never before met either of his visitors, he would have welcomed them to his well-spread board.

For no one need associate the idea of discomfort, far less that of hardship, with the life of a commissioner going the round of his district in the cooler months of the year. A good double tent holds all that even luxury may require. The great Sahib has his numerous satellites,—munshi to write, khansamar to cook, and masalchi to wash up the dishes. He has his bearer to anticipate every want, khitmatgars to wait at his well-furnished table; sweeper, water-bearer, camel-drivers, and two servants to attend on each of his horses—one to groom him, the other to cut grass. Besides this troop of attendants, from each town and village near the halting-place come obsequious natives—those of the higher rank on gaily-caparisoned horses, the more lowly peasants on foot. Some come to offer petitions, some to seek employment, some, as it appears, only to pay their homage to one of the lords of creation. What lies under all this outward respect we need not now inquire. The government of our Empress-Queen's vast possessions in India may be described as a kind of oligarchy, the English officials forming an aristocracy to which all pay at least the semblance of honour. Low are the saláms, fulsome the compliments paid to one

of the higher grade, the official's rank rising, it appears, in due proportion to the shortening of his titles. An assistant deputy commissioner is a chhotá Sahib (little gentleman); cut off the first word, and he rises, we may say, to the rank of a baron; cut off the second, and you may regard him as an earl at the least. Strange must it seem to our Anglo-Indians, on going home for good, to find themselves lost in a crowd, none to follow them, flatter and fawn, meat dear and chickens expensive. Some doubtless heave a sigh at the remembrance of the old days passed in India, when in the pleasant cold weather they went camping out in the district.

Mr. Thole received the missionaries with courtesy flavoured with condescension. Even tent-life had not shaken out of this bara Sahib (great gentleman) all his starch. Unlike some of his equals, he was in his nature rather pompous, and did not carry his dignity with the easy grace which distinguishes those who seem born to rule.

"I fear that we have come at an inconvenient time," began Mr. Hartley; for already the servants were making preparations for serving in dinner. "A little matter of business—"

"Oh! we'll waive the business for the present," said the commissioner, with an expressive movement of the hand. "I've been at it since daybreak, settling disputes, listening to the jabber of villagers, each with a separate jargon; and now the first duty before me is to do justice

to what comes before me—on the table. Take your seat, Mr. Hartley; you look as if you needed dinner and a good cigar after it even more than I do. What! dined already, you say? Forget the past; let bygones be bygones.” And with a little chuckle at his own mild joke, the commissioner sat down to his steaming plateful of rich mullagatawny. It was evident that to him dinner was an important business, to which all else must for the time be postponed.

In vain Mr. Hartley urged that the sun was setting, and that he was anxious to return to Talwandi before night should be far advanced. The commissioner must have his dinner before he could listen to anything which he called “shop.” The repast was a somewhat lengthy one, being made more so by conversation; for the commissioner enjoyed his own good stories as well as his soup. He told of hunting adventure, and adventure with a snake; then, as his servant filled and refilled his master’s glass, there came anecdotes of his horses, and a dissertation on camels.

“Apropos to camels,” said the commissioner, passing his damask napkin over his thick grizzled mustache, “I met with a curious instance of superstition the other day in regard to the slow-paced brute. An urchin had a fall from one of the baggage-camels—rather a tall one—and expecting at least a dislocation to be the result, I was surprised to see the boy sitting composedly on the ground as if nothing had happened. ‘Is the fellow not hurt?’

I inquired of a servant. 'No, Sahib,' was the careless reply; 'it was only a fall from a camel—that is nothing; it would have been worse had it been from a donkey.'

"How did he make out that?" asked Mr. Hartley.

"The man was a devout Mussulman, and he explained the matter in true Mohammedan fashion: 'You see, Sahib, that the camel goes slowly on, as if saying "Bismillah" [in the name of God] at every step; whilst the donkey shambles on as if repeating, "Naddi tuti, naddi tuti" [Broken bone], as he jogs on his way.'—Nizam, bring in the lights.—I think that the Mohammedan is the most religious of men," laughed Mr. Thole, "since his piety extends even to his camels."

"The 'Bismillah' on his lips," observed Mr. Hartley, "has often as little to do with his thoughts as the camel's pace has to do with his religion."

The conversation then took a different turn, as the dessert appeared on the table, and dates on the dish reminded the commissioner of dates on the tree.

"I think that the tallest date-palms that I ever saw were by the temple of Máta Devi," said he. "Of course you have been to the place," he continued, addressing himself to Harold. "There is a most curious idol, of great antiquity, with jewels for eyes."

"I have been to the place on a preaching tour," replied the young missionary; "but I did not see the idol, for I did not enter the temple."

"Would not the Hindus admit you?" said the Sahib.

"Not unless I took off my shoes."

"And why not take off your shoes?" said the commissioner, who held what he considered to be very liberal views. "It is a mere matter of form."

"Neither as missionary nor as Englishman could I pay any mark of respect to an idol," was Harold's reply.

"Oh! I suppose that missionaries have a code of their own," observed Mr. Thole, with the slightest possible shrug of his broad shoulders; "but I may be supposed to know as well as even the youngest of them what befits an Englishman. We Government servants, whilst we are bound to pay no respect to persons, are also pledged to pay due respect to all religions. I should think no more of taking off my shoes in a temple than I should of taking off my hat in a church. Had we lived in the days when the goddess Yoyyathal was said to be wedded to the Indian Government, I might have been bound to carry the bridal gift; and being an official, the act would have done me as little harm as receiving the Kashmir shawl did good to the idol. Do you not see that?" added the commissioner, still addressing himself to Harold.

"I do not see it, sir," said the young clergyman, a flush rising to his cheek. "There are many officials, both civilians and military officers, who do not think that duty to Government supersedes duty to God."

The commissioner looked somewhat offended, and turning towards the elder missionary, directed his speech to

him, as if Harold, for presuming to give an independent opinion, had forfeited any claim to further notice. "Do you know, Mr. Hartley, any well-authenticated instance of an official going straight against Government orders on account of some religious scruple of his own?"

"The most striking instance which occurs to me is that of a man who resigned ten thousand pounds per annum rather than violate conscience," was the quiet reply.

The commissioner elevated his bushy brows to express surprise not unmingled with incredulity. "Who might this man be?" he inquired.

"Sir Peregrine Maitland," replied Mr. Hartley. "His story may have perhaps escaped your memory, as so many stirring events have occurred in India since. This officer, at that time a leading man, was offered the command of the Madras army and a seat in Council."

"He was a lucky fellow," remarked the commissioner, leaning back on his chair; "such big prizes don't fall often to the lot of a man. Pray go on, Mr. Hartley."

"Sir Peregrine accepted the high offices on the express condition that they should not involve him in any connection with Hindu idolatry."

Mr. Thole's muttered "Humph!" and slight smile expressed no great admiration for Sir Peregrine Maitland's superfluous caution. The commissioner helped himself to a cigar from a case brought by a servant, after the missionaries had declined one, lighted it, and raised it to his

lip. He smoked it, whilst Mr. Hartley proceeded with his tale.

“Not many days after the commander had arrived in Madras, in the first despatch-box which he received as a member of Council, came a document to sanction the appointment and payment of dancing-girls in a certain Hindu temple. Sir Peregrine was expected to sign this paper.”

“A mere matter of form,” observed Mr. Thole, removing the cigar from his mouth for a minute. “Whether the member of Council signed or not, the thing would be done. It was simply making a dash with his pen.”

“Rather than make that dash with his pen,” said Mr. Hartley, “Sir Peregrine was ready to resign his high offices. After looking at the paper the commander called out to his wife, Lady Sarah, who was superintending the unpacking of their lately-arrived luggage, ‘Sarah, don’t open these boxes; I am going back to England.’ And, after sending home a fruitless appeal to Government, *go back he did*, resigning his lucrative offices.”

“And I daresay that he repented so doing to the end of his life,” cried Mr. Thole.

“Certainly not *at* the end of his life,” said Harold Hartley: “no man ever on a death-bed repented of a sacrifice made for conscience’ sake.”

Mr. Thole did not relish the conversation, and broke it off abruptly. Throwing away his cigar, he pushed his chair back from the table, and said in rather a dictatorial

tone to Mr. Hartley, "Now, sir, I am ready to hear about the business which brought you hither."

Mr. Hartley felt that the preceding conversation had been an unfortunate introduction to what was coming, for Mr. Thole had resumed all his official stiffness. However, there was nothing to be done but to make a clear, concise statement of all that had led him to suspect that Miranda Macfinnis, daughter of a merchant, supposed to have been murdered with her parents about twelve years before in the Mutiny, was at present shut up in a zenana at Talwandi, and, as a widow, treated with cruel harshness and neglect.

Mr. Thole listened with stern gravity, neither stirring a muscle nor interrupting by a single question until the missionary had produced all the slender information that he possibly could give on the subject. When Mr. Hartley stopped, the commissioner coldly asked, after a brief pause, "Have you anything more to communicate, sir?"

"Nothing more at present," was the reply.

"Then allow me to say that Mr. Hartley has not shown all the discrimination and judgment which might have been expected from one of his experience in bringing before me a case which has not a leg to stand on," said the commissioner, with a touch of impatience. "Your daughter-in-law, a young lady who, as you own, possesses slight knowledge of Urdu, hears a woman in a zenana shout out thrice what she is pleased to consider an English word. It was probably the praise of some of

her myriad gods, *jai* (victory) being easily mistaken for 'joy.' The girl is white; but that is not the slightest proof of European origin—some Kashmiris and Pathans, as every one knows, having complexions perfectly fair. You would have me give weight to the evidence of a youth who owns that he always considered the girl an Afghan, and who would never have thought of her as anything else, had it not been put into his head that the widow may be a European. And on such cobweb evidence as this you would have me to do what would justly make me the most unpopular man in the Panjab, cause probably a serious tumult, and expose me to Government censure!" Mr. Thole's voice rose to a more indignant pitch at each clause in his speech till it reached a climax in the peroration: "No, sir; I have too much regard for the interests of Government and my own honour to violate the sacred privacy of a Hindu zenana by a demand for the production of one of its inmates on an absurd suspicion confirmed by not even the shadow of truth!" Mr. Thole pushed back his chair and angrily rose from the table.

"I see the force of what you say, sir," observed Mr. Hartley; "but should further evidence be brought forward—"

"Of course, of course, if there be documents or proofs such as would justify a demand for the girl's examination, I would do my duty, whatever opposition might be aroused," interrupted the commissioner in a haughty

manner: "at present there seems to be nothing of the kind; and I can only regret, sir, that you have put yourself" ("and me" was understood though not expressed) "to such unnecessary trouble."

"Then we have only to wish you good-night, sir," said Mr. Hartley, attempting to rise; but weary, and overcome by a sudden attack of giddiness, he was unable to do so, and sank back on his chair.

"You must not think of returning to Talwandi to-night, Mr. Hartley," said the commissioner; "you are evidently unequal to riding, even if the road were a smooth one. You and your son can occupy the tent of my munshi."

The Hartleys were unwilling to avail themselves of hospitality offered as a matter of course rather than of kindness; but Mr. Hartley was too unwell to keep the saddle, therefore they were constrained to stay till morning. Harold penned a short letter to his wife, recounting what had occurred, and ending thus: "If my father be better, we shall join you to-morrow; but do not expect us early, as I would not break his morning sleep. The baptism must be delayed till sunset. If possible, gain more information regarding the widow; you may find it advisable to visit the zenana again."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLACK CHARM.

"How is it possible that I should gain more information regarding Premi?" asked Alicia sadly, as she sat alone with Robin at the breakfast table, Kripá Dé preferring to eat his food sitting cross-legged on the floor. "I am certain that I should not be admitted into the fort were I to attempt to go there this morning. The women paid me little attention yesterday, and Darobti was offended at my question regarding Premi. I do not like to visit where I am not welcome; I cannot go to the fort to-day."

"Yet to-day seems our last chance," observed Robin, "as to-morrow the zenana is sure to be closed. Could you not 'screw up your courage to the sticking-point' once more, dear Alicia, and attack the fort like a gallant missionary lady?"

"It would be of no use," said Alicia; "I am not suited for capturing forts. I should only meet with repulse and defeat. If there were a shadow of hope—"

"I have it!" exclaimed Robin suddenly, clapping his

hand to his forehead as if to prevent the escape of a thought. "I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Alicia, but an idea has just come into my head. I can insure you a welcome, I can insure you an audience, if—"

"If what? I am curious to know," said Alicia.

"If you will only go to the zenana in your wedding dress, decked out with your jewels."

"You are joking, Robin," said Alicia.

"I was never more earnest in my life," exclaimed Robin, and his bright, earnest eyes showed that he meant what he said. "The bibis might resist you in your fawn-coloured print; but donning your gleaming white satin, with the pretty little slippers to match—"

"You absurd boy!" interrupted Alicia, "do you think that I would cross that dirty court-yard in white satin slippers?"

"Yes, if it were a very slough!" exclaimed Robin; "if that were the only way of getting into the house. Do you not see," he added more quietly, "that if you display your jewels you may very well ask the Hindu ladies to show you theirs? And should a black locket appear amongst them, why, you would pounce down upon it like a cat on a mouse!"

"Robin's scheme is not so very wild as it seemed at first," thought Alicia.

"What say you to my plan?" asked the lad.

"That it would be all very well—if you could only carry it out yourself."

"I!" exclaimed Robin, with a burst of uncontrollable mirth. "Fancy me in white satin, attempting to force my great splay-foot into one of your delicate slippers!"

"This is too serious a matter for mirth," said Alicia, who for once could resist the infection of Robin's laugh. "Of course if any one goes, I must go. But it would be so very strange to put on finery here—in this jungle!"

"It would be making the very best use of finery," cried Robin, who was grave enough now. "It would be consecrating it to the cause of humanity. I never thought when I saw you arrayed in your wedding attire, and considered you almost too fine to be my sister, that you might make it a means of delivering a zenana prisoner, and perhaps of bringing her under Christian influence."

Alicia sighed, reflected a few moments, then said—"Robin, we must have a prayer together before I venture, I feel so weak and nervous. I never engaged in anything so strange and difficult before."

The brother and sister knelt down together, and Kripá Dé prostrated himself on the floor, though he could only guess the import of the prayer. After its conclusion Alicia went to her own room, unlocked and opened one of her large boxes, and from its envelopment of silver paper took out the dress which she had worn at her bridal.

Some quarter of an hour afterwards Alicia, blushing

under her long white veil, returned to the place where she had left Robin.

"How absurd I must look in this dress!" she observed, glancing shyly at her brother.

"Lovely as an angel," thought Robin, "and going on the errand of an angel;" but he only said aloud, "I admire you more in that white satin now than I did on the first day that you wore it. Come, Alicia; your doli is ready in the veranda."

"I hate being seen, even by the kahars; and how can I pass through the city so strangely attired?"

"We will draw down the blind on either side; no one shall see you."

"My satin will be utterly crushed in that box," cried Alicia, lifting up the rich folds which swept the veranda.

"I'll help to pack in the satin; and if the worst comes to the worst, a crushed dress is better than a crushed life like Premi's."

"Robin, you must go with me; I feel myself in such an absurd position," said Alicia, as she with difficulty settled herself in the cramped space of the doli.

"I will go as far as I may, and wait outside as long as I can," was Robin's reply.

Robin walked by the side of the doli, playfully prompting, encouraging, supplying his sister with Urdu words, throwing the light of his own joyous spirit over the little expedition, till Alicia caught his own love of

adventure. There was nothing so terrible to encounter, nothing so extravagant to do, nothing so difficult to accomplish. Alicia was certainly going beyond missionary rules and regulations, but so peculiar a case had never been contemplated by those who had framed them. Alicia was full of brightness and hope by the time that she arrived at the outer door of the fort.

The kahar knocked with the rattling chain. He knocked twice, thrice, and yet again; only the bark of a dog gave reply.

"There is some one within; I hear moving and talking," said Robin, and he himself energetically repeated the summons at the door, which brought a shrill reply from inside, "*Fursat nahim*" (No leisure), which is the Panjabi form of saying, "Not at home."

"Show yourself," said Robin to Alicia; "I see a child's face peeping over the wall." As he spoke he threw up the blind of the doli on the side nearest to the fort, and then himself rapidly retreated out of sight.

Alicia put one slippered foot out of the doli, and extended one arm, with its satin sleeve and golden bracelet,* to extricate herself and her voluminous dress. The effect was magical. Almost a scream of astonish-

* It need hardly be said that the lady's example is *not* given for imitation. A missionary's dress can scarcely be too quiet and unostentatious. It would be worse than foolish for one to draw on herself the attention which should be given to the message which she bears. When the lantern throws a Scripture picture on the sheet, the exhibiter carefully avoids standing in front of it, lest he should himself hide what he seeks to display.

ment came from the top of the wall; then there was the sound of a rapid rush within; the door was thrown open, and amidst children's shrill cries of "Mem! Mem! devi [goddess], devi!" Alicia entered the court-yard, to be almost mobbed by a crowd of little urchins of both sexes, who came staring and shouting to welcome her in.

Alicia, a little bewildered and half deafened by the noise, picked her way as carefully as she could along the yard, which seemed to be even more dirty than usual. She was cumbered by the necessity of holding up her long dress, while at the same time protecting her head with her white-covered umbrella. It was disagreeable to be jostled by children whose every touch must leave a mark on her white satin; but Alicia went on till the second court was reached, and then the dark stair. Beyond this there were great pushing and scrambling; Alicia was almost thrown down the steps by her noisy, excited young escort. Presently she emerged into daylight, flushed and heated, with her beautiful dress by no means improved by the crush.

There was now no difficulty in collecting women; they came from every likely and unlikely place to stare on an English lady, or rather on the bridal dress which she wore. Premi alone stood on the roof above, with Darobti's fat baby astride on her hip.

"Sit down, sit down!" cried Chand Kor. "Sit down, sit down!" echoed the one-eyed Jai Dé. The bibis were evidently determined to indulge their curiosity to

the full. "Keep back ; bad zát" (low caste), shouted Darobti to the children who were pressing around Alicia to stroke her smooth satin and finger her jewels.

When a little order was restored, Alicia had to play show-woman to the various parts of her dress and the ornaments which she wore. Her satin slippers, her silk stockings extorted many a "Wah ! wah !" the women feasted on the sight of such pretty novelties. Alicia had to take even the silver ear-rings from her ears, to be passed round and admired. The lady's patience was almost exhausted before she had any opportunity of pursuing the object for which she had come. Alicia seized that of the first lull in the noise and excitement.

"Now show me your jewels—all, all !" she cried, repeating the lesson learned from Robin.

The bibis were by no means loath to display their ornaments : chains and head-jewels of marvellous make, rings for thumbs and sheaths for toes, nose-gems and ear-gems, and jingling anklets, bracelets of gold, silver, and glass, were eagerly thrust on the visitor's notice. But in vain did Alicia's anxious eyes search for a black locket amongst them.

"All, all," she repeated—"show me all."

At length the bibis were tired of displaying their treasures ; the Mem Sahiba seemed to have an unreasonable avidity for seeing jewels. Alicia, heated and tired, began to despair of ever finding what she had come expressly to see. Some of the women had gone away,

Chand Kor had taken to her hookah, and Alicia was about to rise and depart, when Darobti opened a curious old box to take out betel to chew—a very common custom amongst Eastern bibis. At the bottom of the box lay what looked like a dirty bit of rag, but Alicia's quick eye detected in that rag something of European manufacture.

“What's that?” asked the lady, pointing to the rag.

The question did not appear to be understood; at any rate it received no reply. Alicia put out her own jewelled hand, and to Darobti's surprise pulled the dirty thing out of the box. It was part of a child's sock, and out of it something dropped on the floor. Alicia could not repress an exclamation of surprise and delight: it was indeed a black locket in the shape of a heart!

Darobti stooped to pick it up; but the eager lady was quicker than she. Alicia was breathless with excitement; she actually held in her hand the two things that might prove to others the fact of which she had now not the slightest doubt—that Premi was her own cousin. “I have you, and I'll keep you,” thought Alicia, after hastily ascertaining that there was an inscription on the locket, and initials marked in red thread on the sock.

“Give that back!” cried Darobti.

Alicia clenched her prize tightly in her left hand, then with her right unfastened her own silver brooch, and held it out to Darobti. “Exchange, exchange,” said the lady.

Alicia's very eagerness was the thing to defeat her own object. Her anxiety awoke in the Hindus both suspicion and that spirit of covetousness which has such power over the Oriental. Why should the Mem desire that little black charm? There must be witchcraft.

"It's a spell to make us all Karanis" (Christians) said Darobti. "I'd rather throw the black thing down the well than let it get into the hands of a Feringhi" (European).*

"It brought no luck when the girl had it," cried the one-eyed Jai Dé. "It may have had something to do with the death of Premi's husband. Let the black charm be taken away!"

"Daughter of an owl, you know nothing!" screamed

* To show how strong this fear of witchcraft is amongst Hindu women, I will give another extract, almost as curious as the first, from the public address of the Christian gentleman and converted Brahmin, T. K. Chatterji. Speaking of his mother he says,—

"She was very much afraid of the witches, and to protect me from their evil influences she used to fast often, and make vows to gods and goddesses. If any devotee happened to visit our village, one of the first things that she would ask him was, whether he knew anything that would keep me from the evil influence of the witches. She would pay him money with which to make puja [worship], and would not mind undergoing any amount of penances for my good. She was not content doing this only, but procured a costly gold chain, and enclosed in its links little pieces of the roots of some wild trees which she thought had the virtue of driving away witches and evil spirits, and she took great care to hang this chain round my neck. She used to spit on my forehead whenever I went out to play with other boys or to the village school, and would not eat anything until I returned home safe."

Oh, what a picture is here presented to us of maternal love, strong though blind, and of slavish, misery-making fear! Such superstition, met with in various forms, is one of the galling chains from which, in God's strength, missionaries desire to free their poor native sisters.

out Darobti ; and an abuse-match began between the two women, carried on in voices so shrill and loud that Alicia would fain have stopped her ears. A Hindu bibi in a passion could probably, in noisy volubility, hold her own amongst women of any other nationality in the world.

Chand Kor being of a less irascible nature, and perhaps less superstitious than the others, was more inclined to drive a good bargain with the ignorant Mem Sahiba, who had taken an evident fancy to a black ornament, old, damaged, and of little intrinsic value. Alicia, confused and half-frightened, yet resolved, cost what it might, to keep the locket. Chand Kor perceived this, and saw her advantage. The lady, willing to exchange one jewel for another, was driven to bid higher and higher, till even the contentious women stopped their quarrelling to see how far the English lady would go.

Alicia's brooch had been rejected; she was ready to add the ear-rings to match, then the silver buckle which fastened her band; but her offers were of no avail. Darobti and Jai Dé kept repeating the word *jadugari* (witchcraft). Alicia knew not the meaning of the word, but she saw that the bibis connected it with the locket, and thought it probably the name by which lockets are called.

"Give me the little *jadugari*," said she, "and take this," and she held out her silver chain.

"It is *jadugari*; she confesses it, the witch!" cried Darobti, shrinking back as if the chain were a snake that could bite her.

But the covetous eyes of Chand Kor, the ruler of the zenana, were fixed on a golden bracelet in the form of a serpent with diamond eyes, which was the most expensive trinket which Alicia possessed, and a bridal gift sent from England.

"Give that, *that*," said the Hindu bibi, "and keep the black thing which you have in your hand."

Alicia, thoroughly disgusted at the woman's mean covetousness, shook her head and rose from the charpai on which she had been seated.

"Give the charm back!" cried Darobti, becoming suddenly aware that whilst she was quarrelling with Jai Dé the cause of the dispute might be carried away.

"Give the charm back!" echoed more than one voice.

Alicia grasped the locket more tightly. It was the property of her cousin, not theirs; she would never give it up except to its rightful owner. A cry for help from above burst from the Englishwoman's heart as she made one step forward.

Strong brown hands were laid on the lady's arm; she had no strength to cast them off—helpless as a dove in the claws of the falcon.

"Give the bracelet!" cried Chand Kor.

With a quick, sudden movement, Alicia drew off the jewel, and flung it from her in the direction farthest from the door by which she had entered. It was a bait, and it took. Every one made a rush in that

direction. Alicia was free—released from the grasping hands which had held her as in a vice. She took advantage of the moment, and rushed to the door which opened on the stair without stopping to say *salám*. She would have forgotten to snatch up her umbrella had she not intuitively seized on it as a weapon of defence. Alicia rushed so hurriedly down the stair that she nearly fell in her haste. She could hear the *bibis* above quarrelling over the jewel which she had flung away, which all coveted, but only one could possess. As Alicia, panting with excitement and heat, sped first across the inner then the outer court-yard, she thrust her prize—black locket and dirty rag—within the body of her bridal dress above her heart, she was so much afraid that in her haste she should drop that which had cost her so dear.

Alicia's troubles were not ended even when with a sense of relief she passed through the second door and found herself outside the fort. There was her little *doli* indeed in the place where she had left it, but to her utter dismay Alicia could see neither Robin nor the *kahars*. Where could they be? In vain the lady called aloud, in vain she gazed from side to side; no one replied, and no one appeared.

"What on earth shall I do!" exclaimed the poor girl. "I cannot possibly return home with no one to carry me."

There stood Alicia, trembling and perplexed, in her

bridal satin, utterly alone, whilst noisy voices, both from within the fort and the adjacent native town, made her equally afraid to return to the first, or to attempt to pass through the other. The sun, now very powerful, was blazing above her, and fears of *coup-de-soleil* were added to other alarms. It was the most miserable moment that Alicia had ever yet known in the course of her life ; never before had she experienced such a sense of helplessness and desolation.

“I must get home somehow,” she murmured, after looking again and again in every direction for her faithless kahars ; “some one may attack me for the sake of my jewels, and I am so utterly unprotected ! O Robin, Robin ! why did you thus desert me ? I must try to make my way back on foot, but not through the town, oh, not through the town, though I suppose that must be the shortest way. I must go by the road, but I am not sure in what direction our bungalow lies. How dreadful it would be should I take the wrong turn ! I cannot stand still under this fiery sun. I have heard that when exposed to its heat it is safer to walk, still safer to run ; but if I run I shall attract more attention, and may be but going faster away from my home. Oh, if I had only any one to protect and guide me !” exclaimed the poor young wife.

The sound of her own words seemed to reproach her for want of faith. Alicia felt that she was only craving the support of an earthly arm, and was forgetting in her

terror that arm which is ever stretched out to help the servants of God. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" flashed on the memory of Alicia. Her exclamations of distress now took the form of prayer. "Lord, save me, help me, guide me!" she repeated again and again as she sped on her way, the rough road marring her slippers, hurting and almost burning her feet. There was comfort in uttering that incoherent prayer, solace in realizing that wherever she might go there was a protecting wing above her. Alicia did not look much around her; she dreaded meeting the wondering stare of natives whom she might pass on the road. But very few people were abroad—here a wandering fakir, there two or three peasants weeding the fields on which the crops were almost ripe for the harvest, which is usually gathered in April. No one molested the poor young wanderer.

At length Alicia reached a place where the road divided. There were two paths before her, both equally dusty and glaring, and she knew not which to take. Alicia stood still, utterly perplexed. Again the prayer for guidance burst from her lips, and then she turned to the right. Before her stretched a long straight road, white with dust and glare, and bordered with cactus. On that road, to Alicia's inexpressible joy and relief, she saw forms which she instantly recognized. Their backs were turned towards her, and they were at a considerable distance; but well did Alicia know the brown tattu

on which her father-in-law was mounted ; familiar and dear to her eyes was the tall form in a sun-helmet which walked at his side.

Alicia eagerly ran forward, attempting to call out as she ran ; but voice and breath failed her, and she was only able to gasp out, "Harold, Harold !" in tones too feeble to reach the ear of her husband. Alicia ran on, then paused to call again, her heart beating so violently that she pressed her hand over it to still its throbbing. A third call, which rose into a cry, burst from her parched lips. At the distance which separated husband from wife it was inaudible to any but Harold ; but love's quick ear caught the sound of the dear familiar voice. Harold turned round, saw his wife, and hurried back to meet her, with an expression of surprise, anxiety, and almost terror on his pale face. Seeing Alicia alone, strangely attired and greatly excited, a horrible suspicion flashed across the young man's mind that the effect of sunstroke had turned his poor bride's brain. In no other way could Harold account for finding her thus—at some distance from home, unattended, arrayed in white satin, and running as if for her life. Harold hastened to meet her, and the poor frightened dove threw herself into his arms, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. This still further alarmed her husband, who mistook the expression of joy and relief for one of distress. Alicia's face was crimson with the exertion of running in the heat, her slight frame trembled violently;

but even at that moment there was a tone of triumph in her sobbed-out words, "I have it—I have it—safe in my bosom!"

"What have you, my love, my life?" asked Harold; but he did not press for a reply. His only thought was how to get his afflicted wife safe home. Mr. Hartley, who had turned to see the cause of Harold's suddenly quitting his side, had ridden back to the spot where his son and Alicia were standing, and shared the surprise and alarm of young Hartley. The missionary threw himself off his pony with all the energy of youth, and bade Harold place Alicia upon it. The agitated girl was lifted to the saddle and supported on it by her husband, who spoke to her gentle words of soothing, as he might have done to a frightened child. Very slowly the party proceeded homewards, Harold holding a white umbrella over the head of his wife. He did not ask any questions; but as soon as the short burst of crying was over, and Alicia had recovered her breath, she was eager to recount her adventures.

"You wonder at seeing me in such a strange dress; but Robin said that my best chance of getting into the fort was to go in my wedding attire. How absurd it must look!"

"So it is Robin whom I have to thank for this!" exclaimed Harold angrily. "I shall take care not to leave you under the care of such a hare-brained mad-cap again."

"But Robin was right, quite right!" laughed Alicia. "I did get into the fort, and I *did* get the locket out of the hands of the Hindu bibis!"

"What locket? you speak in riddles, my love."

"Oh, I forgot that you have heard nothing about the black heart-shaped locket, just like the one which you saw hung round my neck on the first day that we met. Premi had its fac-simile on the day when she was brought to the fort; Robin and I thought that if we could only get possession of it, we could identify my cousin by its means."

Harold's face brightened: an intolerable weight was lifted from his heart; his fears for his wife's loss of reason were gone. Mr. Hartley listened as eagerly as did his son to the full and graphic account which Alicia now gave of her visit to the fort. Harold laughed at the bargaining over the locket, and when told of the flinging away of the bracelet which had had such a happy effect, the husband exclaimed with proud delight, "My noble girl, my spirited wife! you deserve to wear the Koh-i-nur itself on your arm!"

Mr. Hartley's praise was almost as warm as that of his son. "It was bravely done," he said. "Our Alicia had asked for wisdom and courage, and they were given in the moment of need."

"Yes," said Alicia earnestly; "I feel that I was helped all through, or I should never have succeeded. Was it not a mercy that at the very moment when I knew not

whither to turn, you should have been passing along the road?"

"Had not our departure from the encampment been delayed by my oversleeping myself," observed Mr. Hartley, "we should have been at the bungalow hours before this."

"You were so weary—you have been ill!" cried Alicia. "I cannot bear to ride while you walk; I would rather, far rather be on foot."

"My child, I have boots; your little slippers have been fairly worn out in honourable service," was the playful reply.

"Robin must never twit me about them again," said Alicia.

"What to me is incomprehensible is Robin's conduct to-day!" exclaimed Harold, with a touch of indignation in his tone. "It is so unlike him to bring a sister into a difficult situation, and then to desert her, after promising to keep near."

"And why did the kahars too run away?" cried Alicia; "something very strange must have occurred."

"The mystery will soon be cleared up," observed Mr. Hartley, "for we have come in sight of the bungalow at last."

The reader will find the solution of the mystery in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRUGGLE.

WHEN Alicia went into the fort in her quest after the black locket, Robin, keeping the doli in sight, removed to a place at a short distance where he would be less liable to observation. There, under a peepul tree was a well to supply the inmates of the fort with water, and this water, as is very commonly the case in India, was drawn up by means of a Persian wheel. This contrivance, which is never seen in England, is familiar to dwellers in the East. Two oxen, yoked to a shaft which is attached to a large wheel, by going round and round the well make the wheel revolve. Its circumference is completely encircled with a garland of small earthen pots. As the big wheel turns round, its lower half in the well, such of the pots as are lowest dip under the water, and thus necessarily become filled. The revolution of the wheel raises these full vessels higher and higher, till each in turn reaches a point where the turn of the circle empties out all the water contained in the pot into a wooden trough. By the water flowing through this

channel, a tiny streamlet is fed to irrigate the fields or supply the personal wants of the people. To Robin this manner of raising water by a Persian wheel was nothing new, but as he now stood waiting he had plenty of time to watch the simple contrivance, and the revolving wheel, with its filling and emptying jars, formed itself into a parable in his mind.

“These oxen go round and round on a wearisome course of work, perhaps themselves suffering from thirst whilst raising water for others. They are like our home societies, our secretaries and committees, labouring in dear old England to turn the mission wheel. All these little jars are emblems of the missionaries themselves; that one broken at the rim I’ll take as a type of myself. Here you go down, down, little jar—there’s a need of humility; keep aloft, and not a drop of water can reach you. You must descend before you can mount. There! my jar has disappeared in the well—it is, as it were, lost in its work; this is the filling time for the little vessel. There! I see it again, dripping and glistening and rising! Up it goes to empty itself of its treasure, to send fertility into the fields, and comfort into the home, to make the dry furrows laugh with a future harvest. The jar is but a poor, mean thing of clay, yet it has its use in the world,—emblem of weak men and weaker women, of whom God deigns to make use to carry to the thirsty heathen that water of life—the knowledge of a Saviour.”

Robin, who of late had not only thought a good deal, but written a good deal—his pen taking, as he said to himself, the place of a wife—was so full of his little allegory, which he thought that he might turn into a poem, that he did not take notice of the approach of a party of men, till one of them suddenly addressed him. Turning his eyes from the Persian wheel, Robin recognized in the handsomely-attired native near him Thákar Dás, the chief who ruled in the fort. The Hindu did not give the Englishman the *salám* which courtesy demands, and there was something of insolence in the chief's tone and manner as he abruptly said, "Where is Kripá Dé?"

"Why do you ask me?" said Robin, perplexed by the sudden question.

"Because you are certain to know. You and your brother have misguided the lad—you have bewitched him; have you baptized him too?"

"No," was the curt reply.

"Have you made him break his caste? has he eaten with you?" demanded the angry Hindu.

"What right have you to inquire?" asked Robin.

"Am I not his father?" cried Thákar Dás.

"Kripá Dé has no father, nor mother neither," said Robin, "and he is of an age to choose for himself."

"He is under fourteen years of age!" cried the Hindu.

"Kripá Dé is full eighteen years old; no one knows that better than yourself," said the indignant Robin.

"Happily his *janam-patri* [horoscope] is with us."

“You have seen it!” exclaimed Thákar Dás. “Then the boy is in hiding with you?”

Robin was silent; he could not deny the fact.

The chief gave a signal both with voice and with up-lifted arm to a body of men whom he had stationed at some fifty yards distance on the road which led to the mission bungalow. “Off—seize Kripá Dé!” shouted Thákar Dás; and in an instant the band of Hindus were rushing in the direction of Mr. Hartley’s house, to execute the command of their chief, and carry off the disgraced and degraded Brahmin. Some of these Hindus were armed with sticks and clubs; but had they borne swords and guns it would have been all the same to Robin Hartley. He had but one thought—“Kripá Dé is in danger; I must warn him. These Hindus have the start of me; but I’ll be at the bungalow before them.” And off darted Robin at speed.

Alicia’s kahars, eager, like all natives of India, to see a tamasha (which might be Anglicized “to be present at the fun”), deserted the doli, and hurried off in the same direction.

The other Hindus ran fast; but “with heart of fire and foot of wind,” the active Robin overtook them midway and passed them, narrowly missing a heavy blow from a club. Victor in the race, panting and streaming with perspiration, the English youth came near enough to the bungalow for his shout to be heard by one within it. “Up to the roof, Kripá Dé!” He had no breath to say

more. It was too late for the convert to fly with any hope of escaping; but if he could mount to the roof, Robin had resolved to take his own stand on the steep narrow outside stair which led to it, and make good its defence against the attacking force. "I think that I can keep the wolves at bay, at least until the arrival of my father and Harold shall reduce the odds against me," muttered Robin Hartley.

Kripá Dé, as commanded, fled to the roof; Robin shouted to him to lie down flat, so as not to offer a mark to the shower of bricks with which the pursuers were likely to assail him. Robin himself caught up a hatchet which had been left on a heap of rough timber which a servant had been chopping up for firewood. This was a formidable weapon wielded by a strong, vigorous English arm. Robin mounted the steep stair, took his stand on one of the upper steps, and in an attitude of defiance awaited the expected rush of men from below.

The Hindus looked up, but did not attempt to come within reach of the swing of the hatchet. No one chose to be the first to encounter the fearless boy. A brief consultation appeared to be held below. Robin could not hear the words spoken, but he was soon to see their effect. About half the number of Hindus moved off. Young Hartley knew that there was no inner staircase to the bungalow, and therefore considered that the only way of reaching the convert on the roof was by passing over his own body. But Robin has forgotten

that Alicia's "paradise" had a separate outer staircase, and that the dwellings were so close to each other that they virtually formed but one. Young Hartley was reminded of his oversight by seeing dark figures running over the flat roof of his brother's house. Robin could not guard two staircases at once, so springing upon his own roof with intent to defend Kripá Dé to the last, he saw the poor young convert struggling in the grasp of a dozen dark hands. Robin beheld no more, for he was himself struck down by a bludgeon which laid him senseless on the flat roof. There he lay, bleeding and unconscious of all that was passing around him. When the poor youth recovered his senses, he found the place deserted; the convert had evidently been carried off, and all that he had himself gained from the brief struggle to save Kripá Dé was an aching head, from which blood flowed freely over his face and dress. Robin raised himself, first to a sitting posture, then to his feet, looked around, and then, though feeling sick, dizzy, and faint, made his way to the stair. He descended the steps much more slowly than he had mounted them, and just as he reached the platform below his father and the rest of the party arrived. Alicia gave a cry of horror when she saw the state of her poor young brother.

"My boy! what has happened?" exclaimed Mr. Hartley in alarm.

"Kripá Dé has been carried off," was the reply. Robin had no thought for anything else.

"And you?"

"Oh! never mind me. What a blockhead I was to forget the second stair!"

"Your hurt must be dressed at once," cried Alicia.

"It's nothing—a mere knock; the thing to be done is to rescue poor Kripá Dé!"

Robin was in such an impatient mood that he would hardly submit to have his wound washed, dressed, and bound up. Harold played the surgeon, and Alicia the nurse, wrapping round her brother's head a delicate white scarf which had formed part of her own apparel.

"O Alicia, your satin is stained with blood; it will never be worth anything again!" cried Robin.

"My satin has done its work," was Alicia's reply: "I have through it secured the black locket."

"Secured the black locket!" exclaimed Robin, springing from his seat, and clapping his hands for joy like a child.

"I will now at once write to Mr. Thole a full account of this cruel, cowardly attack on my son," said Mr. Hartley, "and of the carrying away by violence one of her Majesty's subjects."

"And you will add that the proof of Premi's identity with Miranda Macfinnis, my wife's cousin, is in our hands," observed Harold; "that Alicia has secured the black locket, which is exactly similar to the one in her own possession."

"And tell of the fragment of a child's sock," added

Alicia, "and that it has the initials 'M. M.' marked upon it."

"Oh, show me these things!" exclaimed Robin.

"Sit down, sit down," said Harold: "we must not have the end of the scarf hanging down like a streamer, instead of binding up your poor broken head. If you will be quiet, like a sensible fellow, Alicia will show us her trophies of war."

With very great interest were the black locket and piece of old sock examined and handed around. Both had suffered from time and rough usage, but on the locket the inscription in minute letters, "E. T., 1856," was legible still, as well as the mark on the sock. Mr. Hartley, after examining these relics, sat down to his desk and wrote as concise and forcible an account as possible of the attack on Kripá Dé, the injury received by Robin, and the manner in which the proofs of Miss Miranda Macfinnis's identity had come into the missionaries' possession. "Doubtless due investigation will bring out other and yet more convincing evidence," Mr. Hartley wrote in conclusion. He then sent off his letter at once.

"Alicia, you have managed your part of the affair much better than I have done mine," said poor Robin, whose head was aching sorely under its improvised picturesque turban.

"It was you who put me in the way of doing anything," was Alicia's reply. "I am a coward, and should

never to-day have ventured into the fort at all had you not given me courage, and helped by your counsels and prayers."

"Our exotic has climbed bravely," said Robin, glancing at his father. "Did I not foretell that it would soon smile down on us all?"

CHAPTER XVI.

WATER ! WATER !

KRIPÁ DÉ, in the hands of his enemies, at first struggling madly, then yielding to a force which he had no power to resist, was dragged away toward the fort. As the shorter route through the town was taken, the crowd of excited Hindus around him grew larger as the party hurried on with their prey. Wild cries and howlings resounded on every side. Now and then a blow was given to the helpless captive, which made him feel sensibly how utterly he was at the mercy of superstitious fanatics, to whom breaking of caste, especially by a Brahmin, appeared a horrible crime. Kripá Dé had become an object of contempt to those who, a day before, might have fallen prostrate at his feet. The persecuted youth made no attempt to address the crowd—his voice would have been lost in the uproar ; but he lifted up his heart in silent prayer. It was less a prayer for deliverance than for strength to keep faithful unto death. Kripá Dé knew that a terrible ordeal might be before him—that, once within the walls of the fort, he

might have to suffer what nature shrank from, and he mistrusted his own power to endure; but the poor lad in his misery cast himself on a power greater than his own. "O Lord, let me not deny Thee! let me rather die than deny Thee!" was the convert's silent but fervent supplication. It was at once the cry of fear and the prayer of faith.

Not all of the excited crowd were permitted to enter the court-yard of the fort; and of those who pressed in, but few were suffered to pass the second door, which led to the women's apartments, which formed the most private part of the building. To this part Thákar Dás resolved to take his prisoner, woman's entreaties, reproaches, and curses being, he thought, more likely to be effectual in shaking the convert's resolution than the threats and even the violence of man.

Kripá Dé, after being rudely pushed up the steep dark stair, had on the upper platform to face the anger and the insults of the women, as well as to answer the stern interrogations of the chief of the fort.

"Where have you been since you left us on pretence of making a pilgrimage?"

"With friends," replied Kripá Dé, as soon as he was able to speak.

"Friends! beef-eaters! slayers of the sacred cow! Hast thou eaten with them, vile wretch? Hast thou blackened the faces of thy family, hast thou disgraced

thy dead mother, and cast dust on the grave of thy father, by eating with the impure?"

Kripá Dé did not deny the charge, and his silence brought on him a furious volley of abuse from Darobti and the other women, who assailed the convert with epithets too vile for repetition here. At a pause, however, Thákar Dás commanded silence by a wave of his hand. The chief had loved and been proud of the beautiful boy whom his wife had adopted, and the Hindu had not given up all hope of winning Kripá Dé back to the faith of his fathers. The path of return is not so much blocked up now as it was once against the return of those who have forsaken the Hindu religion.

"Hear me, O son of Shiv Prasád!" exclaimed Thákar Dás. "Thou hast been bewitched by English sorceries, and hast cast away like a madman the privileges of thy high birth. But the gods may yet be propitiated and the Brahmins appeased. The holy waters of the Ganges, the swallowing the five sacred products of the cow, with large offerings which I will make for thee at many temples, thine own pilgrimages, fastings, and ablutions, may yet restore thee to the high position from which thou hast fallen, if thou swear by the holy gods to abjure the faith of the Christians."

"I would rather part with my life than my faith!" cried the young Kashmiri, his fair cheek flushing and his lip quivering as he made the reply.

This declaration renewed the pelting of the pitiless

storm of abuse and invectives. Darobti pulled off her slipper, and with it struck the youth on the face.

"Why do you treat me thus?" exclaimed Kripá Dé. "I have done wrong to no man, I have injured none, I am of an age to choose my own religion. The English Sircar [Government] will protect me."

"You are a child; you are under fourteen," cried Chand Kor, with the unblushing effrontery often shown in such cases. "I can swear that ten years ago thou wert an infant in arms."

"We can bring a dozen witnesses!" exclaimed Thákar Dás. "We will do so if the case be brought into court."

"The Sahib has my janam-patri," said the young Brahmin.

This renewed the tempest of abuse.

"Has the Sahib your sacred thread also?" almost shrieked out the aunt of the convert.

Kripá Dé was about to say "No;" for to have given his thread to an eater of beef would have been in the eyes of the family a crime like parricide in enormity. But the lad remembered what Robin had said about falsehood; so he pressed his lips together to keep in the word, and by silence signified assent. Again Darobti struck him on the face, and Jai Dé spat at the Brahmin.

About an hour passed thus, a terrible hour, during which Kripá Dé was the butt of the coarsest abuse. Then Thákar Dás and his few attendants withdrew from

the women's part of the building, carefully fastening behind them the door on the upper part of the stair—the door of communication between the zenana and the lower part of the fort, and the two courts which have been repeatedly mentioned. The weather being warm, most of the women then went by an outer stair to the upper terrace, which was also comprised in their allotted quarters. There, sitting in the sunshine, the bibis span at their wheels, or prepared vegetables for the evening meal, which they had not yet begun to cook. Chand Kor alone remained near Kripa Dé, big tears of mingled anger and sorrow now and then dropping from her eyes, and such words as these from her mouth:—
“Hac! hac! would that thou hadst died ere thy lips could speak! would that the destroyer had strangled thee in thy infancy! Thou art dead now, cut off! Thou art like a dead dog, a crushed worm; thou art lower than the dust of the earth!”

“O my Lord, Thou didst bear shame and reproach for me!” thought the poor convert; “shall the disciple not suffer like the Master?”

Hours passed, miserable hours; the heat was oppressive; Kripá Dé's mouth was parched with feverish excitement, and he longed intensely to quench his thirst. The youth moved towards a brass vessel which he knew contained water, and was about to pour some into his hand, when Chand Kor, starting up angrily, overturned the vessel and emptied it of its contents.

“Who would drink anything out of a vessel polluted by thy vile touch?” she exclaimed.

“O mother, mother! have you no compassion?” exclaimed Kripá Dé, addressing Chand Kor by that most tender of names, in order to touch her heart. “Do you mean to let the only child of the sister whom you loved die of thirst in the midst of abundance?”* Kripá knew that the time for the evening meal had arrived.

Chand Kor looked at her nephew sternly and steadily for some moments, and then said: “No! Mihtab Kor’s son shall not die of hunger or thirst. I will send thee food and water, but by the hand of a *mitráni* [sweeper, one of very low caste]. Eat, drink, and be doubly defiled!”

“Not by the hand of a *mitráni*!” exclaimed the Brahmin, as his aunt went away to mount the stair to the upper gallery, from which a savoury scent of curry was now proceeding.

“By a *mitráni*,” repeated Chand Kor, turning round to give a look of contempt. “Thou art only fit to herd with *mihtars*.”

The English reader will hardly understand the utter disgust with which the high-caste Hindu looks down on the *mihtar*. Forced to make use of his services—for the *mihtar* is the scavenger of the house—he is deemed unclean like the vulture. Food touched by the

* It was believed that a convert who *disappeared* had been quietly starved to death in his home.

mihtar would be thrown away; some Brahmins would rather die than eat it. Kripa Dé had not yet lost all the prejudices of his caste; like some native Christians even of some standing in the Church, he shrank with repulsion from any contact with one of the mihtar class.

“But is it Christ-like to despise any human being whom God has made?” reflected Kripá Dé when left alone. “Did not the Sahib tell me that Peter was forbidden to call any one common or unclean? Is it not true that the Lord died for mihtars as well as for Brahmins? It cannot really pollute me to take water from a mitráni when I am dying of thirst. I will drink it, and thank God for the draught.”

It seemed to poor Kripá Dé that the longed-for water never would come, he had to wait so long, whilst eating and drinking were going on above; and now and then women and girls looked down on the prisoner, and laughingly asked him if he were ready for food.

The sun had by this time set, and one faint little star after another appeared in the sky. Then a low-caste woman, as Chand Kor had threatened, holding in one dirty hand a chapattie (unleavened cake), and in the other an earthen vessel, came down the outer steps, and without speaking put down what she had brought, then instantly quitted the spot. The mitráni was never suffered to sleep in the town, far less in the fort; but Thákar Dás having shut up the only door of communication with the lower stair, the sweeper had been thus

accidentally detained a kind of prisoner in a place where she would not be allowed to cook her food, far less to eat it.

“I could not touch that chapattie—I am too miserable to be hungry,” thought Kripá Dé; “but, oh, the water! the water!”

The thirsty captive eagerly caught up the earthen vessel, and was about to drain it, when he caught sight of a face, pale with terror, the eyes dilated with fear, on the terrace above him, and heard a voice, the voice of Premi, exclaiming in a loud warning tone, “Do not drink! the water is poisoned!”

Kripá Dé sprang to his feet, and flung the vessel and its contents over the low parapet beside him into the court below. He did not doubt for an instant the truth of the warning; the playmate of his childhood would never deceive him, and it was only too probable that his family would prevent the disgrace of his baptism by a deed of secret murder.* But how was Kripá Dé to escape the double danger of dying of thirst or by poison? The poor youth rushed to the door at the head of the inner stairs, with a wild hope to find it unfastened, or to break it open by a desperate effort. Alas! it was fast shut, and its strength defied any human effort to force it. Only one desperate course remained, and the

* The authoress has had personal acquaintance with three natives on whom (two of them after recent baptism) such attempts have been made to destroy intellect, if not life.

convert took it. He sprang over the parapet down into the court—a formidable leap, which no one had calculated on his attempting. It seemed to Kripá Dé that it was by miracle that he alighted on the ground unhurt, but he had not a moment for reflection. In an instant he dashed into the outer court. He made no attempt to open the door which led out of the fort; young, active, and desperate, Kripá Dé took a shorter way of escape by springing over the wall. He knew well that he would be pursued; he could hear the shrill call of the women on the roof who had seen his escape, and who gave an instant alarm. From the part of the building where men were eating and smoking rushed forth fierce pursuers. But Kripá Dé was fleeing for his life, terror lent him speed, and, unlike Alicia, the convert knew well the way to the mission bungalow; he could have reached it blindfold.

The family in the bungalow, tired out by a day of such unusual excitement, Robin feverish from his wound, and Alicia from the fatigue and exposure which she had so lately undergone had resolved to retire very early to rest. Previous to so doing, they met to unite in evening devotions.

“We will not forget to pray for our poor Kripá Dé,” said Robin, as he was about to kneel down. The name was yet on his lips when the convert himself, pale and panting, rushed into the room and sank down at his feet.

“Lock the door! bar it! he is sure to be pursued!” exclaimed Mr. Hartley; and in two seconds Harold had closed the door and locked it.

“Water!” cried the convert faintly. The hand of Alicia quickly supplied the fugitive’s need.

“They are after me!” cried Kripá Dé, when he had drained the glass. “They tried to poison me; Premi saved me. I fear that she will have to pay dear for giving me warning.”

“She will not be long in the enemy’s hands, I trust,” said Harold.

As he spoke, loud angry voices from without and violent shaking of the door, followed by furious blows, showed that the pursuers had arrived.

“The door is not strong enough to stand much of this!” cried Robin; and snatching up a stick which was at hand, he looked ready for another battle with the foe.

Harold went up to the closed door, and his voice rang out in clear tones, which were heard above the battering and the furious demands for admittance.

“Back with you all!” he cried.—“Thákar Dás, it is no light matter to break into an Englishman’s home!”

“Give up Kripá Dé! give up the wretch, the apostate!” yelled the Hindus. Then a brief lull of silence ensued, that the reply might be heard.

“We will never give him up but with our lives,” said Harold firmly. “If you think that you have a right

to imprison and poison him, bring your case into court; we expect the commissioner here to-morrow."

This announcement was startling to the Hindus, who had a wholesome dread of bringing on themselves the wrath of the Sircar. Thákar Dás and his followers knew that the two attacks on the dwelling of one of the ruling race would be likely to expose them to serious consequences, which they had no wish to meet. Heartily glad were the Hartleys that the letter to Mr. Thole had been so promptly penned, so quickly despatched.

"Will you not tell them, my Harold," said Alicia, "that we have proofs that Premi is of English birth?"

"No!" cried both the brothers almost in a breath; and the elder added: "If the Hindus knew that this second charge—that of imprisoning our countrywoman—could be brought against them, poor Premi would be only too likely to disappear mysteriously before we could claim her."

"Can the Hindus have gone away?" cried Alicia; "a wonderful stillness has succeeded to that terrible noise."

"They are going away like baffled hounds," said Robin, who was making a survey.

"We were about to kneel down to pray," observed Mr. Hartley; "let us do so now, and join our praises to our prayers. This has been a day of wonderful mercies."

Very fervent were the thanksgivings which rose from the missionaries' home.

After all had risen from their knees, Robin observed, "I will sit up to-night; these jackals may return for their prey."

"*You* sit up, looking like a ghost as you do!" exclaimed Harold. "You have played your part bravely to-day, old boy, and have left your elder brother nothing but the office of a chankidar [watchman]. We must all remain in the house to-night; but to prevent semi-suffocation the doors must be open. I give you my word that I will not sleep on my post."

Harold kept his word, watching till morning; but the attack on the bungalow was not repeated.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMMISSIONER.

THE bara Sahib had proposed to move on his camp to a distant part of the district. Mr. Thole's plans were laid, and he was not a man lightly to change them. The commissioner's tents were struck, and put on the backs of camels; his servants had gone forward in advance with the cooking utensils—for the great man must have his dinner ready for him on his arrival at Dhaul. In order to have it ready, chickens would have to be captured, killed, and cooked, mutton procured, vegetables boiled, curry prepared, and of course tents pitched for the Sahib's accommodation.

But plans, however well laid, cannot always be carried out, and troubles and inconveniences come sometimes even to Commissioner Sahibs.

First appears the dark sais to inform his master that his riding horse has cast a shoe, and that no one can quickly be found to replace it. The blacksmith has gone to a wedding.

"If I can't ride, I can drive," said the Sahib with a

frown. "Order the buggy [gig] to be got ready at once."

Accordingly, the buggy-horse is put into harness; but even as John Gilpin, when on the point of starting, saw "three customers come in" to detain him, so is the not very patient commissioner detained by three headmen from three villages, each with a separate petition to make. The commissioner mutters something not very complimentary to his visitors, but stands resolutely to listen with as good a grace as he can to fulsome compliments on his wisdom, justice, and generosity, and then to expressions of that kind of gratitude which has been well defined as "expectation of favours to come." The commissioner is an able man, but there are two things which he has never quite succeeded in performing,—to make tedious petitioners study conciseness, and to keep his own temper under the infliction of their harangues.

At length the three lambardars are dismissed. Mr. Thole gets into his buggy, and takes the rein into his hand. The pawing horse is on the point of starting on his journey, when another unforeseen annoyance occurs. A brown urchin has been pelting with bits of hard mud a large tree near, to bring down the sour fruit which he sees on its branches. On that same tree wild bees have been making a kind of nest, larger than the head of a man. One of the pellets hits the nest, and brings down the vengeance of its warlike inmates, not on the boy

who has disturbed them, but on the unoffending sais and horse. The air is full of buzzing, and half-a-dozen bees presume to attack the Commissioner Sahib himself. Maddened by the pain caused by a hundred stings, the poor horse, with bees clustering over his nostrils and eyes, rushes forward at speed, dashes the buggy against the stump of a tree, breaks the harness, and smashes the wheel.

Such an incident as this may scarcely merit the name of an adventure, but is fraught, as the writer has seen, with consequences very unpleasant. The sais, rolling on the ground and yelling, with a black cap of bees on his head, the horse frantically struggling, the great man only able to rid himself of his despicable foes by rushing to a small tank or pond happily at hand, form together a scene of discomfiture and disaster. At the close of an hour, behold the horse, freed indeed from his tormentors, but trembling as if with ague; the sais, groaning aloud in his pain; and the commissioner, with both cheeks swollen to an unnatural size, and one eye partially closed.

Here comes another man with a paper; making a *salám*, he presents it to Mr. Thole.

"Where does this come from?" asks the commissioner with a frown.

"From the Padre Sahib," is the messenger's reply.

"Oh! I had enough of these missionaries last evening," mutters Mr. Thole; and he is inclined to fling the despatch

aside, when the word "Urgent" on the envelope catches his eye. In no mild mood he tears it open to glance at the contents, which are written in a clear, even handwriting, as if to invite perusal. Mr. Thole glances at the signature at the end, "Robert Hartley," and sits down on the stump against which the wheel of his buggy was smashed, to read whilst awaiting the coming of his riding-horse, for which a smith has at last been found.

Mr. Thole begins to read with that sour expression on his damaged face which denotes an inclination to dispute or deny whatever may be written in the paper before him. But, not gradually but almost suddenly, that expression changes to one of interest, mingled with surprise.

"This is a strange case, a very extraordinary case," he mutters. "A locket found in a zenana—a locket the very counterpart of a family memorial possessed by young Mrs. Hartley, with a legible inscription too. And part of a child's sock, marked with initials. This is strong, decidedly strong corroboration that these rascally natives have really abducted an English child, Miranda Macfinnis, cousin by the maternal side of a lady now in Talwandi!" The commissioner rose from his seat; his national pride was roused. "If this crime can be proved—this offence against the ruling power—these villanous Hindus shall rue it. The case must be investigated without delay. Ho! Mir Sahib!" (a servant answers the call), "send off at once after my servants

and tents ; call them back. I must be to-morrow at Talwandi."

"Talwandi!" exclaims the astonished man.

"I am not accustomed to repeat my orders twice," is the irritable reply.

It had shown knowledge of the character of the man with whom he had to deal when Mr. Hartley in his letter had put the case of Premi first; had he begun with a complaint regarding the violent carrying off of the Brahmin convert, Mr. Thole would have felt no sympathy, and have put the case aside for a while, muttering some abuse of missionaries as weak, meddling, mischievous men. But "What will they say in England?" rose to Mr. Thole's mind, to quicken his interest in the romantic story of the long-lost Miranda. The commissioner's indignation was also roused by the personal attack made on an English youth by the Hindus; he admired the young man's courage, while undervaluing the missionary's zeal.

Talwandi was in a state of great excitement on the following morning when the news that the Commissioner Sahib had arrived spread like wild-fire through the town. Thákar Dás naturally connected the great man's coming with the attack on the mission bungalow, and the blow received by Robin Hartley from the hand of one of the chief's attendants. Thákar Dás determined utterly to disclaim having had anything to do with such a breach of the law; he would declare that he had never

approved of violence, that the attack had been made without his sanction, and even without his knowledge. The Hindu was wily as a fox ; but whilst avoiding the trap, he found himself in an unsuspected pit.

Numbers of the inhabitants of Talwandi crowded the court, which was held in a tent. Mr. Hartley and his sons were present, and Kripá Dé in their midst, the object of fierce, angry invectives from the people, who were restrained from more violent persecution only by the august presence of Mr. Thole.

The commissioner opened the sitting in a way utterly unexpected by the Hindus. It was as if a bomb-shell had fallen amongst them when Mr. Hartley, coming forward, in a clear voice requested the production in court of a widow, known by the name of Premi, whom he could prove to be an Englishwoman, Miranda Macfinnis, detained unlawfully in the fort.

Mr. Thole sternly demanded of the chief, Thákar Dás, whether he knew anything of such a person.

Thákar Dás was utterly taken aback. At first he stammered forth a flat denial that such an individual had ever been seen at Talwandi.

"Can any witnesses be produced?" asked the commissioner.

"There are two present," was Mr. Hartley's reply : "one, this young Brahmin, who saw the English child when she was first brought into the fort, and has had frequent opportunities of conversing with her since ;

the other, this lady." He turned towards Alicia, who with a thick veil down was standing beside her husband. "Mrs. Hartley has not only seen the widow more than once, but has heard from her lips a fragment of an English hymn which could not have been learned from her Hindu companions."

"Let this Premi be produced at once," the commissioner said in a tone of command.

Then the wily Hindu changed his tactics, showing as little regard for consistency as he had done for truth. He declared — shedding tears to confirm his words — that the widow was to him as a daughter; she had been brought up in purdah; she would die of shame, she would kill herself, if forced to leave her seclusion.

The commissioner's only reply to this pathetic appeal was a reiterated command to produce her. If she were not brought into court, an order to search the fort would be given.

There were murmurs of anger and looks of indignation amongst the bystanders, even low threats might be heard; but Mr. Thole was determined to carry his point, and he did so.

After tedious delay, a form, supported between two old women—for it seemed almost ready to fall—appeared in the court. The form was so entirely muffled from head to foot in a large white sheet that its shape could scarcely be defined. A silence prevailed which was broken

by the commissioner's voice: "Remove the sheet; the woman must be identified, or the case cannot proceed."

Thákar Dás fell on his knees, and flung his turban on the ground in a passion of distress. Shedding plenteous tears, he exclaimed, "My daughter! my daughter! she will never survive the shame of being uncovered before the eyes of strangers. O your highness! O dispenser of justice! spare me and my house this terrible disgrace."

The Hartleys felt pity for the humbled chief. Harold stepped forward, and addressing the commissioner said: "Might it not be sufficient, sir, for my wife to see and identify this lady?"

"Let Mrs. Hartley ascertain that the person in court, who from her feebleness appears to be of great age, is really identical with the young widow in question," said Mr. Thole.

Alicia approached the drooping figure before her, encountering as she did so a look of mingled anger and terror from Jai Dé, who was one of the women acting the part of supporter. Gently the lady drew back a part of the shrouding sheet, and then started back with an exclamation of horror. "They have been murdering her!" cried Alicia. The old women, relaxing their hold, retreated backwards, and the veiled form sank on the ground.

"Water! bring water!" cried Robin, and he rushed out to procure some.

The sheet was at once and entirely removed from the slight form of the senseless sufferer. With unutterable indignation the Europeans beheld the young girl's bleeding and bruised face, still bearing tokens of delicate beauty, and the white arms on which the marks of violence showed how cruelly the fair creature had been treated. Harold, kneeling, supported poor Premi in his arms, whilst his wife bent over her with all the tenderness of a sister.

"A European, without the shadow of a doubt!" muttered Mr. Thole with indignation. "If my poor young countrywoman die, there is some one here who shall swing for it."

Perhaps the keenest feeling was shown by Kripá Dé as he gazed on the ghastly features of the playmate of his childhood and exclaimed, "They have punished her for saving my life ; she is dying for me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WAITING TIME.

BUT Premi was not dying. She had been severely, mercilessly kicked and beaten, but no vital part was injured. What she needed was kindness and care, and that she found in the home of her cousin.

The result of her case, which filled many columns in local papers and was the sensation of the day in England when the account of it reached that land, may be summed up here in few words. Premi, or Miranda, as we may now call her, could never be persuaded to tell at whose hands she had received her terrible beating. Some feeling, perhaps of delicacy, perhaps of pity for her old female companions, prevented her from letting out the secret. From the impossibility of knowing who was the actual offender, no inmate of the zenana received the due reward of her barbarous conduct. Alicia suspected Darobti; but neither her name nor that of any other bibi escaped the lips of Miranda. She seemed to wish to draw a thick purdah over the past.

Thákar Dás narrowly escaped very severe punishment

by being able to prove that it was not he, but a brother since dead, who had brought Miranda Macfinnis into the fort. The Hindu declared that he did not know that she was English; that he had taken her in from motives of pure compassion; and though few believed his vehement assertions, the contrary could not be proved. But the chief could not so easily meet the second charge—that of having directed two attacks on the mission bungalow, in the first of which an Englishman had been wounded and a Hindu youth violently carried away. The attempt to poison Kripá Dé aggravated the offence: though it was not proved that Thákar Dás actually committed the crime, there was strong suspicion against him. A very heavy fine was inflicted, with long imprisonment in default of payment. Thákar Dás was a disgraced and ruined man. Unable otherwise to pay the heavy penalty imposed, the Hindu had to give up his fort and the land held for centuries by his forefathers, and, accompanied by the female portion of his family, quit for ever that part of the country.

Mr. Thole had expressed his opinion that Chand Kor should be compelled to return to Mrs. Hartley the gold bracelet which she had tried to win from her by meanly bartering for it a bauble not worth a tenth part of its value, and not even legally her own. But Harold declined such reparation in behalf of his wife. "Mrs. Hartley threw the bracelet to the women of her own free will," he said, "and, I am sure, would not desire such restitution."

"Was I right, darling?" he said to Alicia, after his return from an interview with Mr. Thole.

"Quite right," answered his wife. "I would never wish to take back anything given for the Lord or His work."

Alicia never knew the fate of that jewel. It was sold ere long with other valuables to purchase the bare necessities of life for Chand Kor and Darobti, who had to pound their own rice and grind their own corn for themselves.

The evening after the conclusion of the trial, which lasted for some days, Alicia said joyfully to her husband, "Now one sheaf at least is gathered home. Premi—I mean Miranda—is our own, quite our own. She has almost recovered now, and will soon, I think, lose all trace of her bruises, and look lovelier than ever."

"You say that Premi is quite our own, my love," observed Harold; "but are you her nearest relative? I think that you have more than once mentioned that she has a brother in England."

"Oh! Cousin Gilbert, who was at home preparing to go to college in the Mutiny year, and so escaped the fate of his poor parents."

"He is then Premi—Miranda's natural protector and guardian."

"I should be sorry to trust her to his care," cried Alicia. "Gilbert is a gay, thoughtless sort of fellow, and has been lately married to a foolish fashionable girl.

I should be most unwilling to send our rescued cousin to them. It would not be mercy to her."

"We must think of justice as well as of mercy, my Alicia. A brother has a right to be consulted about the future of an orphan sister. The English mail goes to-day ; will you write to your cousin, or would you wish me to do so ?"

Alicia felt and looked disappointed. She had encountered much difficulty in finding a jewel, and then in drawing it from the dark mine in which it had been buried ; and now, was she contentedly to hand it over to one who had given nothing, suffered nothing, and who might place no value on what had cost her so much ? It was with rather an ill grace that Alicia sat down to her desk. Everything seemed to combine to make the task distasteful. The wood of the desk was warped by the heat, the ink in the bottle half dried up. Alicia had to throw away one quill pen after another, and her own heated, languid hand moved wearily over the paper, which the pankah (for Robin had contrived a pankah in the new house) was perpetually trying to blow away to the other side of the room. The hot season was beginning, Alicia's first hot season, and everything that she did was done with an effort.

Alicia had other little troubles connected with her newly-found cousin, troubles which she poured forth to Robin in the evening, when sunset had brought some slight relief from the heat. The brother and sister were

slowing pacing up and down the veranda, Alicia with rather a melancholy air.

"Is anything vexing my fair sister?" asked Robin in that cheerful and kindly tone which invited confidence and usually obtained it.

"I do not like to trouble Harold with all my small perplexities," replied Alicia, wearily fanning herself as she spoke.

"First let me relieve you of your fan, and then do you relieve yourself of your perplexities," said Robin, taking from Alicia her little hand-pankah. He swayed it to and fro with an even, measured movement, far more effectual and soothing than Alicia's fitful, fluttering shake.

"I thought that it would be so easy to make Premi happy and comfortable in my Paradise," said Alicia (the coming of the guest had hastened the removal to the newly-built house). "I thought that the poor girl would find kindness and love so delicious after her miserable life in the fort. But in trying to make her well and happy, I find a difficulty at every step."

"You know the definition of a difficulty—'a thing to be overcome,'" remarked Robin. "Let us look steadily at yours; perhaps it will vanish as we look."

"Of course Premi needs nourishment," said Alicia; "but it is hard to know what to give her, especially as the hurt on her hand makes her unable to cook for herself. We all know that for invalids doctors always prescribe beef-tea, so I was determined that Premi should

have it. With no small trouble I procured some beef from Chuanwál; I boiled it myself, for I could not trust Mangal to cook it—he always fails in the soup.”

“Heroic Alicia!” exclaimed Robin; “did you really stand fire in such weather as this?”

“Cooking certainly was no pleasure,” replied Alicia; “but I managed to do something, for I was so anxious to give my poor cousin what might help to make her well soon. I thought that she would enjoy anything prepared by my hands.”

“And the result?” asked Robin smiling, for he guessed what it was likely to have been.

“The poor foolish thing rejected my beef-tea almost with horror, as if I had been offering her boiled toads or snakes, or something equally disgusting. Premi clenched her teeth tightly, turned away her head, and would not touch nor even look at my soup.”

“You must remember, sister dear, that poor Premi has been brought up from childhood to regard beef-eating with utter disgust. She is now free from Hindu slavery, but the chains of its superstition are hanging on her still. We must have patience, dear Alicia, and try to remove them so gently that we shall not gall the poor wrists that have worn them so long.”

“Another difficulty is about dress,” said Alicia. “Premi—Miranda—came clad in little better than rags, blood-stained, too, from her terrible beating. I felt that Miranda should dress like an English lady, as she really

is one by birth. I made the effort of rummaging through one of my big boxes—everything now is an effort—and selected a parcel of clothes. I thought that Miranda Macfinnis would look so nice in one of my neat-fitting costumes.”

Robin playfully inquired how Miranda Macfinnis had appreciated the costume.

“Not at all,” replied Alicia, smiling notwithstanding her disappointment. “Miranda made not the slightest attempt to help me to perform her toilet, though she offered no actual resistance. I had to dress her as I would have dressed a large doll. I held the sleeve ready, but the passive arm had to be guided into its place. I had to put every little hook into its corresponding eye, and after all my trouble saw that the clothes sat ill on one who had never donned a tight-fitting garment before. However, I was glad that a tiresome task had been accomplished, and led Premi—I mean Miranda—in front of my mirror to let her see the effect.”

“What did she think of her own reflection?”

“Miranda just caught up her own soiled chaddar, and drew it closely around her—head, blue dress, and all.”

Robin laughed at Alicia’s vain attempt to make her cousin look like an English lady.

“The worst was when I tried to make my cousin put boots on,” continued Alicia, unable to resist joining in Robin’s mirthful laugh. “Her feet are certainly not

larger than mine, and I had chosen an easy pair of boots. But all my persuasions and attempts to draw on the obnoxious articles ended in a burst of crying and sobbing on Premi's part, and something like despair on mine."

"Why distress the poor girl by compelling her to adopt English dress when she would look so much more beautiful in her own?" cried Robin. "Would you compare an ugly stiff hat—I beg your pardon, Alicia—with a chaddar falling in graceful folds round a slight, youthful form?"

"But suppose that Gilbert should send for his sister," cried Alicia, with something between playfulness and impatience, "would you have her create a sensation by tripping barefoot up a London staircase, or introduce her to a fashionable sister-in-law wrapped up in a chaddar?"

"Wait till you know what Gilbert decides on, and at least wait till cooler weather comes, before you inflict the torture of the boot on poor little feet accustomed to freedom. And as regards chaddars, could you not contrive to manufacture one out of your odd pieces of muslin?"

"But Miranda will never be able to appear as a lady in England if we let her continue to dress like a Hindu," observed Alicia smiling.

"I do not think it likely that she will ever go to England," said Robin; "and if she remain at Talwandi,

surely it is better that Premi should remain as a kind of silver link between European and native. She will be far more useful in mission work if we do not quite separate her in dress and habits from those whom she once deemed to be her own people."

"In mission work!" exclaimed Harold, who had just joined his wife and brother in the veranda. "Robin, do you forget that the poor girl is as yet not even a Christian?"

"She will be one," cried Robin the hopeful. "We shall see Premi a Christian—yes, and a worker. Alicia will rejoice over her sheaf."

"God grant it!" said Harold fervently. "Were Premi, who is so conversant with everything regarding Hindu zenanas, to be able to assist my dear wife in her work there, she would be an untold blessing to us all. Thákar Dás will be compelled to quit the fort, and I hope to be able to purchase it. I have been writing by this mail to Clarence, Ida, and other friends, to collect means for making the purchase."

"And what would you do with the large building if you had it?" asked Alicia.

"I should find abundant use for it, my love. There would be space not only for a boys' school, a prayer-room, and library, but for a place where converts might sleep. And—what think you, my Alicia?—might there not, in the women's apartments, which are, as you know, in a separate quarter, be collected little Hindu girls from

the town to form a small school, a little centre of light, to be presided over by my dear wife?"

"With Premi to teach under her!" exclaimed Robin.

"I think this is rather like building in cloudland," observed Alicia, but she smiled as she spoke.

"If Premi is to be a teacher, she must be a learner first," said Robin; "anyways, Miss Miranda Macfinnis should know how to read."

"I will begin to teach her to-morrow," said Alicia.

The task proved harder than that of persuading Miranda to adopt English costume. Robin made an alphabet in large Roman letters, to master which was to be Miss Macfinnis's first step on the ladder of learning.

"I will teach her four or five letters each day," Alicia had remarked, "and the alphabet will be mastered in a week."

But a week passed, and all the young teacher's efforts had not enabled her pupil to see clearly the difference between an A and an O.

"Miranda is dreadfully dull at learning, though quick at everything else," sighed Alicia, when confiding her new trouble to Robin. "She, an English-born woman nearly sixteen years old, will not master the English alphabet."

"Why not try the Gurmuki?"* suggested Robin; "it will be easier for one who knows no language but Panjabi to learn the familiar sounds."

* Gurmuki is the character in which Panjabi is usually written.

"I do not know the Gurmuki alphabet myself," observed Alicia, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Oh! I'll teach you both, if you will be my pupils," cried Robin. "Kripá Dé would have taught you better, no doubt; but as we've sent him off to Lahore for safety and further education, you must accept me as a master in default of a better. Premi is too shy of Harold to learn from him."

It was true that Premi was less painfully bashful with Robin than with either his father or brother. Mr. Hartley was to her the buzurg (elder)—reverenced but feared; Harold was the Padre Sahib, in whose presence the shy young creature always drew her chaddar over her face; but Robin was a privileged person with Premi as with every one else. She knew that he, like herself, had risked life to save Kripá Dé; she looked on him as her old playmate's bhai, or brother, and even spoke of him by that name. Robin once laughingly observed that Miss Miranda Macfinnis did not regard him as one of the lords of creation at all, but as a big, good-natured, shaggy dog, whom she did not expect to bite her.

So, under his tuition, Gurmuki lessons were begun, and Alicia was surprised to find that Premi learned more rapidly than herself, and with keener enjoyment.

"Does Miranda know her own early history? is she aware that she has relations in England?" Harold inquired one day of his wife.

"She does not know much. You see, dearest, that I

am scarcely strong enough yet in Urdu to tell a long, complicated story."

"Robin had better tell her. Miranda does not seem shy with him," observed Harold.

So, on the following morning, before lessons were begun, Robin gave Miranda a short, clear account of those early days of her life which had left no impression on memory. Miranda listened as she might have done to the story of what had happened to some one else many years ago. It was to her a thing of the past.

"But all this has to do with the present too," observed Robin. "Do you know, Premi, that you have a white brother in England?"

"And a white sister too," added Alicia, "the wife of that brother."

There was a soft pleading look of love in Miranda's dark eyes as she drew Alicia's hand to her own bosom, then pressed it to her own lips, and murmured, "Premi wants no sister but you."

"But you have a brother," said Robin: "his name is Gilbert Macfinnis; he is your nearest relation. He may wish to have you beside him in England."

"Across the black sea!" exclaimed Miranda, and such a look of terror passed over her fair young face that in pity the conversation was changed.

That it was not forgotten appeared by the thoughtful, mournful expression which Miranda now often wore, and the anxious look with which she watched the opening

of any letters. But never in conversation did Miranda allude to her white brother. As for his name, it was to her as yet unpronounceable, and more difficult to remember than the English alphabet. The young girl secretly regarded Robin as her white brother, and she had no wish for any beside.

Alicia's greatest anxiety regarding her young cousin was in matters more important than her style of dress, education, or family relations. Harold's wife, when once Miranda was safe under her roof, had calculated on her conversion to Christianity as a sure and probably an easy thing to be accomplished. Separated from all heathen influences, placed under the daily instruction of devoted and gifted spiritual pastors, constantly with a friend like herself whose kindness the orphan repaid with clinging affection, how could Miranda fail to become a Christian? The once oppressed widow could not but see the difference between a religion of love and one of fear, the difference between loyalty to a Saviour and dread of a demon, between freedom and bondage, darkness and light. But those who, like the elder Hartley, have laboured long amongst those who have been from childhood brought up in superstition and error, know how strangely, it seems unaccountably, the heart clings to its idols. Spiritual work is not like a sum in arithmetic—given so much time, so much labour, so much prayer, and then a certain visible result. We must toil and pray and seek to persuade, but the work of grace

is, like life which is its symbol, something beyond the ken and the wisdom of man. In missionary work we must reverently accept, as if addressed to ourselves, the Saviour's answer to His apostles, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." We can see, even with our half-blind eyes, reasons why this should be. Our insufficiency to do anything of ourselves throws us on the power of Him who is all-sufficient. We are humbled, God is exalted. We can but remove the swaddling bands from the spiritually dead; the voice of Omnipotence alone can say, "Come forth from the tomb!" We preach as it were to dry bones; the Spirit of God must breathe on them, or they will never revive and stand up. It is grace that opened our lips; it is grace that must wing our words, or they will fall short of the mark.

It was with such reflections that Harold tried to cheer his young wife, when with tears she spoke of the deadness of Miranda's soul. "She drops asleep even when father is preaching in the native tongue. She only, I fear, listens to the Bible in order to please me. Miranda loves me, tenderly loves, but it seems as if she would not love the Saviour."

"Patience, my love," said Harold. "Remember the words, 'Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.' That blessed rain

may be coming now, like the little cloud no bigger than the hand of a man which was seen rising above the sea, in answer to the prayer of Elijah."

Robin, laying his hand on Alicia's, quoted, not quite correctly, favourite lines,—

"Fret not for sheaves, but holy patience keep;
Wait for the early and the latter rain;
For all that faith hath scattered, love shall reap.
Gladness is sown; the Lord may let thee weep,
But know no tear of thine is shed in vain."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WHITE BROTHER.

THE heat continued to increase ; to Alicia it seemed to be terrific. The accommodation in the two bungalows was small. Mr. Hartley and his daughter-in-law had repeated attacks of fever, though not of an alarming nature. Miranda was the most gentle and loving of nurses, and became increasingly dear in the mission circle. "If Gilbert send for his sister, I know not how we shall bear to part with her," said Alicia. "Miranda is opening out like a flower, and such a lovely sweet one !"

Robin Hartley was by far the merriest of the circle, and during the trying season helped to keep every one's spirits alive. He was naturally of a joyous nature, and he had now found a new fountain of pleasure. Little cared Robin for the heat, even when it shut him up in his little room in semi-darkness with the musquitoes, for he had his pen and paper with him. Robin had taken to composing, and found great delight in the occupation. No one knew whether he was writing a Panjabi vocab-

ulary, a journal, or an epic poem ; Robin kept his own secret, like a child bent on giving some one a surprise. He himself carried a thick roll of paper to the post, and he watched as eagerly for a reply as did Alicia for an answer to her letter to her cousin Gilbert.

The looked-for mail-day arrived. Harold brought in to his wife three letters bearing the English post-mark. Alicia singled out the one which was *not* in a familiar hand ; these sprawling characters she guessed to be traced by her cousin, from whom she had never before had a letter. Miranda—seated on the ground, her favourite position still, though she had always a chair at meals—watched with anxiety in her fine dark eyes the face of her cousin. She seemed to know, as by instinct, that the letter which Alicia was perusing related to her own fate. The letter, which was read aloud, ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR COZ,—I am sure that you have shown wonderful ingenuity in ferreting out this sister of mine. I was never so astonished in my life as when I found that I had one. The whole story is like a sensation novel or a transformation scene in a pantomime. But when the novel is closed, or the curtain falls on Columbine, the whole thing is over, and nothing remains to be done. This affair of Miranda is a different and much more difficult matter. You ask me if I wish to have my sister home to be educated in England ; you give

me to understand that she is a kind of raw material (silk in the cocoon, I suppose) which her friends are to work up into satin. The girl can't read, write, or spell, cannot yet use a knife and fork, does not know a word of English, and prefers squatting on the floor to lolling on a sofa like a lady! What on earth could I do with such a heathenish sister?"

"I should like to punch that fellow's head!" exclaimed Robin, his eyes flashing with indignation. "He may have a head to be punched, but he certainly has not a heart."

Miranda looked at her angry bhai with alarm. "There must be something very dreadful indeed in that letter," thought the poor girl. "I am afraid that I have a cruel white brother in England."

"Let's hear the rest of the letter," said Harold; and Alicia resumed her reading:—

"I could not introduce to my wife and her acquaintance a girl—a *widow*, you say—who might startle us by plunging her hand into a fricassee, or whooping like a Red Indian."

"What does the fellow mean by that?" fiercely interrupted Robin.

"Oh, I suppose that Gilbert classes all sorts of Indians together," laughed Alicia: "he was always a thoughtless boy. I daresay that he thinks that our Premi wears a coronet of feathers, and perhaps a chaplet of human teeth." Again the lady read on,—

"Then if any respectable school would admit this wild widow, there are no funds to support her there. Government has agreed to do something in consideration of what was lost in the Mutiny; but what is fifteen pounds per annum in England? hardly enough to pay a dancing-master's fees. No, no; the wild widow had far better keep where she is. Perhaps you could find another black husband to suit her."

Robin struck his clenched fist on the table with such violence that he threw over a tumbler, and smashed a plate, and filled Miranda's young heart with vague apprehensions.

"Oh, have pity on my crockery, Robin!" exclaimed Alicia; "I cannot replace it here."

"I am very sorry that I have done mischief," said Robin, as he picked up the broken pieces. "It is not your fault that you have such a cousin, nor Miranda's that she has such a brother."

The sound of the name which she had been taught to recognize as her own increased the uneasiness of poor Premi. The letter which had made her bhai so very angry certainly related to herself. A vague fear that suttees might be thought the correct thing in England, and that her white brother might wish to burn her alive, flitted across the poor girl's mind; however, she was somewhat reassured by the smile on the lips of Alicia.

"It seems as if we should never get to the end of

this letter," said Harold, taking the paper from the hand of his wife. "Where were we—oh, here;" and he went on with the reading aloud:—

"Or you might make a missionary of her, perhaps. I leave all arrangements to you; I am sure that the best will be made for the poor little waif by you and your husband."

"He wants to wash his hands of the care of his own, his only sister," muttered Robin. "This Gilbert is unworthy of the name of a brother!"

Alicia caught sight of the look of anxious, almost agonizing inquiry in the eyes of Miranda, and hastened to relieve her at once.

"We have heard from your brother in England," she said in reply to the mute appeal.

Miranda flushed and visibly trembled; her lips moved, but uttered no sound.

"Your white brother wishes you to remain with us in India."

Miranda sprang to her feet with a cry of delight, then sank sobbing into the arms of Alicia, clinging to her as a frightened child might have done. "Then He *did* hear me!" was her almost inaudible exclamation.

"Who heard you, dear Miranda?" asked Alicia.

"God," was the reverently murmured reply. "I did ask Him, I did beseech Him to save me from being sent away from Talwandi."

This was the first indication which Miranda had given of understanding the nature of prayer.

“Then you are willing to stay with us, dear one?” said Alicia.

Miranda’s reply was a fervent, passionate embrace ; then, ashamed of having given such outward expression to her joy in the presence of men, Miranda retreated hastily into the adjoining dwelling.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WELCOME RAIN.

FIERY June had run more than half its course when it came, the longed-for, the prayed-for blessing, the copious welcome rain. The heavens were overshadowed with clouds, veiling completely the dreaded sun. The sound of the heavy, ceaseless downpour was to the almost exhausted dwellers in the plains sweeter than music. It was delightful to watch the brown water streaming from each spout above, rushing along each gutter below. It was pleasant to see the earth first dotted over with big drops, then transformed into pools covered with dancing bubbles, while frogs croaked their monotonous song of joy, and a delicious coolness pervaded the air, which had been like the breath of an oven. "The rain! the blessed rain! God be thanked for the rain!" was the exclamation intuitively uttered.

Robin came out into the veranda of "Paradise" to enjoy the scent of the wet earth, the sight of Nature reviving under the heavy rainfall, and the sound of plashing water. Miranda was there; she had come

for the same purpose. The air had slightly blown back the chaddar of the fair girl, and with the rose-tint which the comparative coolness had brought to her cheek, and the brightness which pleasure gave to her eyes, Miranda looked beautiful in the mellowed light from a cloudy sky. The young girl did not retreat when Robin appeared; she was not shy with her bhai and tutor, for during Alicia's attacks of fever Robin had adopted her pupil. Miranda had under his tuition made great progress, being eager to surprise her beloved sister with her acquirements in English as well as Gurmuki. She could even put short English words together, and read Panjabi with fluent ease.

The conversion of his fair pupil was the daily subject of Robin's prayers, as of those of the other missionaries of Talwandi. As the youth looked now on Mirandi's lovely form and face, his whole heart rose in fervent supplication for her who had been so wonderfully brought to share Alicia's home. Robin then, advancing towards Miranda, said, "What are you looking at, my little sister?"

"The rain—the good rain. See how the thirsty ground is drinking it in!"

"Who sends the good rain, little sister?"

Miranda folded her hands and looked upwards.

"Should we not thank God for the rain?" asked Robin.

"All thank God—trees, birds, earth," was the reply.

"But we have more reason to thank God than have the trees, the birds, and the earth. Do you not remember what you have heard so often about the best, the greatest of gifts?"

Miranda looked down and did not reply.

Robin suddenly changed the conversation, while keeping the one point at which he was aiming in view.

"Miranda, I heard from your Kashmiri bhai yesterday." A slight smile came to the girl's lips, and she raised her head to listen. "Kripá Dé asked me to tell his sister that he never forgets that she saved his life by her timely warning."

"Premi is glad," said Miranda softly.

"When you called out to Kripá Dé not to drink from the poisoned cup, did you think that your giving such a warning would bring you into trouble and danger?"

"I thought that I should be beaten, and I was so," Miranda replied.

"You did a brave and kind action," said Robin, "and I am sure that Kripá Dé is not ungrateful." Miranda blushed like a rose at the praise. "But suppose," continued Robin, "that you could only have saved your bhai by drinking the poison yourself, Miranda, would you have drunk it?"

A strange expression flitted over the lovely face. Miranda did not reply at once; then she said, in a hesitating tone, avoiding meeting the questioner's gaze, "I think that I should have drunk it."

"And you would in dying have expected, and justly expected, to be ever gratefully remembered by him for whom you had sacrificed life?"

Miranda slightly inclined her graceful head in assent.

"And yet how coldly you seem to regard the greatest sacrifice that ever was made! Many who thank God for rain, which descends at His simple command, never thank Him for the unspeakably greater gift of His only Son. There are those who read, or hear without interest, without love, that Christ tasted death for every man. Do you understand what that means?"

"I suppose that it was like drinking poison," said the girl.

"Yes, like drinking poison, the deadliest poison, for every believer. I should think that for each individual there was a separate pang to be borne. I believe that when Christ hung on the cross He was drinking the deadly cup instead of me, instead of you, till the whole terrible draught of poison was finished, the cup drained of the last deadly drop."

"And I have never loved Him, never thanked Him," murmured Miranda, the soft tears rising to her eyes.

"Do you love Him, do you thank Him now?" exclaimed Robin.

The brimming eyes overflowed; Miranda covered her face with both her hands, and Robin, with delight, caught the whispered words, "I do! I do!"

Oh, blessed rain that comes at last! Thank God for the

blessed rain—that which maketh the heart to blossom and bud, that which brings life to the dead in sin! Thank God for the rain which drops from heaven—the dew of His Holy Spirit!

Robin was too full of joyful hopes not to hurry into “Paradise” to let Alicia share them. Harold’s young wife was still a prisoner to her sofa after an attack of fever, but she was rejoicing, like every one else, in the beginning of the season of rain.

“Robin, is not this change delightful?” said Alicia.

“Most delightful!” echoed her brother; but he was not thinking of the weather.

Robin was beginning to tell his deeply-sympathizing listener of the impression which at last had been made on the heart of Miranda, when Harold entered, with a packet of letters in his hand which he had just taken from the dripping postman.

“Two English letters for me, one Indian one for my wife, and a registered despatch for you, Robin,” said Harold, distributing his little budget. “The postman is waiting in the veranda for your signature to the paper.”

Robin sprang forward, in his eagerness almost snatched the letter from the hand of his brother, and was out of the room in a moment.

“A registered letter is a novelty to Robin,” observed Alicia, smiling, as she broke open the envelope in her hand; “I never knew him receive one before.”

“Nor dart away in such a hurry when the English mail was about to be opened,” said Harold. “This is Clarence’s handwriting, this Ida’s neat little hand ; their letters will be interesting, as telling us what success they have had in collecting money for the purchase of the fort.”

Harold and Alicia were engaged in reading their letters, when Robin returned to the room, his face radiant with pleasure.

“I hope, Robin, that your despatch has been as cheering as ours,” said Harold.

“First, let me tell you of mine,” cried Alicia. “Here’s a cheque for fifty rupees for our work ; you will never guess who sent it.”

“Tell me ; I am in no mood for riddles,” said Robin gaily.

“Would you think it ? the cheque is from Mr. Thole, with a nice little note besides.”

“And so much money has been collected by friends in England,” said Harold, “that we have almost enough to purchase the fort ; only about a hundred rupees are wanting.”

“Then take the fort at once, and plant on it the red-cross banner,” cried Robin gaily : “here is the powder and shot which is lacking,” and with the joyousness of a boy he tossed to Harold a currency note for a hundred rupees.

So Robin’s secret was out. He had entered the literary arena, and with a success that surprised himself.

"I did but write a simple account of our adventures in Arabia," said he, in reply to a question from Harold. "I thought that when it was too hot to dig in the garden, go out to shoot a pheasant, or come home to cook it, I might earn a trifle by my pen. I am astonished to receive a hundred rupees, and mightily pleased by the publisher's note: 'We shall be glad to have further contributions from R. H.'"

"And do you wish to give the whole of this to the mission?" asked Harold, glancing at the currency note which he held in his hand.

"Of course," replied Robin simply; "the first-fruits are always the Lord's."

CHAPTER XXI.

A LETTER FOR HOME.

WE will now pass over a considerable space of time, and look over Alicia's shoulder as, on the third anniversary of her wedding-day, she is penning a letter to her sister.

"I can hardly believe, dear Lizzie, that I have really been three years married, though that darling, golden-haired Robin, who is trying at this moment to climb upon my knee, serves as a charming reminder. He is like—oh, so like!—his father, only his merry laugh is Robin's.

"You ask how the work in the fort goes on. Just to our heart's desire. We are full of gratitude to Him from whom all goodness flows. The best room in the fort has been fitted up as a church; we have service there every day, and thrice on Sundays. A grand gift for our wedding-day has arrived—a harmonium, on which I shall play the hymns. There is a nice room for the boys' school, with a large veranda in which the brown urchins squat at their lessons. To enter that

school is like going near a hive of bees, there is such a humming of voices.

“We—Miranda and I—have a nice girls’ school of our own in quite a different part of the fort. It is in that very gallery where I first saw poor Premi pounding away at the rice. I can scarcely recognize that unhappy young Hindu widow in the tall, graceful, beautiful Christian lady who is to me as the sweetest of sisters. You write, ‘I suppose that Miss Macfinnis has quite cast off all her old Hindu ways, and is quite the English demoiselle now?’ No, not exactly. Miranda is not, I think never will be, just like one who has always trodden a drawing-room carpet; she is more like Shakespeare’s Miranda—a beautiful blossom reared under Indian skies, not in a conservatory at home. Miranda always by preference wears the chaddar when she is engaged in the mission work which she loves, but when we are at home her luxuriant hair is braided just like my own. She reads and converses well in English, but with a slight accent which to our ears makes her language more sweet. We all love her dearly, and her native pupils are ready to kiss her feet. Miranda’s influence over them is much greater than mine.

“We had an absurd little scene a few days ago; I laugh at the recollection. The bara Sahib, Mr. Thole, paid us a visit. I suspect that his curiosity drew him here, for he had never seen Premi since that strange day when, shrinking and trembling, bruised and bleed-

ing, a poor oppressed Hindu widow was brought before the commissioner, whose verdict would decide her fate. Miranda entered our sitting-room without knowing that a guest was there; her chaddar was off, her hands filled with flowers from the garden which Robin has made. She looked herself like a rose. The commissioner rose, with his stiff, formal politeness, and said, 'This is, I presume, Miss Miranda Macfinnis.' Miranda started like a frightened fawn, dropped her flowers, and vanished out of the room. I could scarcely keep my countenance when I apologized for my young cousin's unintentional rudeness. 'A little jungly,' said Mr. Thole, with a condescending smile. 'You should send her to a school in the hills.'

"I must add that poor Miranda was very penitent for having treated the commissioner thus. 'I was so startled,' she said; 'the unexpected sight of Mr. Thole called back such strange and terrible recollections. But I should have rather thanked him on my knees for what he did; he was one means of delivering me from bondage to freedom, of changing ignorance and misery to this light and love and joy.'

"Miranda used at first to be a little afraid of Harold's father; but that feeling has long since passed away, and she looks upon him with the deepest reverence, something, I fancy, resembling that with which the Panjabis regard their gurus (religious teachers). She would, I am certain, think it a privilege to wash his feet. Our

father's health is now so much broken that he cannot itinerate at all, and we often fear that his day is drawing near to its close. But what a calm, peaceful, glorious sunset is his! I always think of him when I look at the picture which hangs on our wall, representing a weary reaper falling asleep with his head resting on one of the golden sheaves around him. The rich warm light is falling on his face, so full of peaceful repose. Death to our father will be but sinking to sleep.

‘ Oh, how calm will that rest appear !

Oh, how sweet will the waking be !’

But I do not like to anticipate losing one so dear, so I will turn to another subject.

“I have often told you of Robin, the brother of my loved Harold, and his unfailing fund of good-humour and fun. During the last few months Robin has greatly altered: he is no longer the merry, boyish youth, but seems, almost suddenly, to have developed into the thoughtful man. Perhaps this comes of his having become a now well-known author, whose brain must be ever at work, as well as an evangelist, teacher, and general aid in the mission. My brother often sits dreamily, and scarcely hears a question when it is put to him; sometimes the colour suddenly flushes his cheek without any visible cause. Perhaps Robin overworks; sometimes I fancy— Oh, what a blot! Mischievous baby has upset my ink. I shall have to punish the little rogue by— putting down my pen and having a romp.”

CHAPTER XXII.

YOKED TWAIN AND TWAIN.

ABOUT an hour afterwards, when baby had been made over to his grandfather's care, to give his mother leisure to prepare for her wedding-day feast, Robin came in from village preaching. He had a very preoccupied look, as if he were looking either far back into the past or far forward into the future, and had no eyes for anything near him.

"What are you dreaming of, Robin?" exclaimed Alicia gaily. "You must not put your bag of books on the top of my dough."

"I beg pardon," said Robin in an absent manner, and he took a seat beside his sister.

Alicia went on with her kneading, and rather wondered that Robin, usually so obliging, made no offer to help her.

"Are you composing a poem in honour of the day?" asked Alicia; "or is marriage, after three years, too prosaic a subject?"

"It may be a lifelong poem," replied Robin.

"I suppose that I might take that for a compliment," said Alicia, smiling, "but for the qualifying *may*. Now tell me the truth, Robin: did you not think three years ago that there was more of poetry than of wisdom in Harold's engagement—in short, that he had made a little mistake?"

Robin smiled. "I am not bound to confess what I thought," he replied.

"Silence often tells as much as speech. You did not think that Harold had made a little, but perhaps a *great* mistake," suggested Alicia.

"Sister dear, I own that you looked to me too fine—too much of a delicate drawing-room belle to be suited for a mission Mem," was the candid reply; "but I only proved myself to be—a donkey."

"No, Robin; you were perfectly right," said Alicia frankly. "My Harold *did* run a great risk, and I showed—well—presumption. I was far too ignorant, too weak, too self-willed, for a missionary's wife. Had I always remained as I was when my Harold put this gold ring on my finger, I should have been utterly unfit for my position; I should have been a clog instead of a help. But I hope that I have learned something from our father's wisdom, your plain speaking, and my dear husband's patient love; I have also learned something from seeing my own mistakes."

"Most of all from the Book which is our guide in every stage of our lives," said Robin.

"But I am still a long way from being a good mission Mem," said Alicia. "I have now a much higher standard than was mine three years ago, and I feel how very far I fall short of it. Miranda, who was then a poor, ignorant heathen, makes now a better worker than I do."

"But do we not owe Miranda to *you*?" cried Robin, in his old impetuous manner. "You pitied her, you rescued her, you brought her amongst us, you have taught her all that she knows."

"No, Robin; the most precious knowledge of all was, by God's grace, imparted through you."

Robin's eyes glistened with inexpressible joy. He thought, but his lips were silent, that such a privilege might well repay the toil of a lifetime.

Alicia, who had paused a little in her occupation, now resumed it with redoubled energy. She had not looked so fair in Robin's eyes in her wedding-dress of white satin as she did now in her simple pink print, with her sleeves tucked up and her slender hands all whitened with flour. Robin watched his sister as she mixed and stirred and kneaded.

"Harold is very happy," he said at last in a dreamy tone. "There is no doubt that 'two pull together, when yoked twain and twain,' far better than a solitary worker."

"That line was written for mission maidens," observed Alicia; "they are usually placed two and two in their stations."

“Not only for mission maidens,” said Robin; “surely it holds good with mission couples. What a helper you are to Harold! You cheer him in trouble, you share his joys, you work amongst the wives and daughters of those whose worst hindrances are in their homes. You break away the thorns that would wound your husband, you strengthen his hands in the Lord, you sharpen his weapons for fight. You make Harold realize the truth of that word from Scripture—*A prudent wife is a gift from the Lord.*”

“May you also prove its truth one day, dear Robin,” said Alicia, with a smile of gratification.

Robin flushed till his very brow was suffused with crimson. Had his sister guessed the secret which he thought that he had so carefully concealed from all?

“Alicia, I can speak on one subject more freely to you than I can even to Harold,” said Robin with an effort. “You know that I can earn something now—enough, more than enough, for two with simple tastes, who live out of the world as we do, who care not for earthly show, who ask but for daily food and raiment, and a humble place in God’s vineyard. Do you think, dare I hope, that I could make Miranda happy?”

“You had better ask that question of herself,” said Alicia, smiling. “I see that the kahars are setting down her doli in the veranda. Suppose that you help her

out, and leave me undisturbed to finish my wedding-day cake."

Robin went readily enough; and yet his heart beat faster than it ever had done in a moment of danger, and he experienced more of fear. He felt as if all his earthly happiness were staked on the issue of one brief interview with one around whom every fibre of his loving heart was twined. We will not record the conversation which passed in the veranda of "Paradise." Before it was ended, Mr. Hartley and Harold, with baby Robin perched on his father's shoulder, had come through the connecting doorway which had been made between the bungalows, and joined Alicia, who had just completed her cake.

"Where is our good brother?" asked Harold. "Is he at his composition at this holiday time?"

"Robin is beginning his life-poem, I think," observed the smiling Alicia, glancing towards the veranda.

The words were yet on her lips when Robin, his face beaming with happiness, came in, leading one who was indeed to him *a gift from the Lord*.

And here we leave the Hartleys, rich in the joy which is multiplied tenfold by having God's blessing upon it.

Robin's playful words came true: he *did* marry a bride who went to church in good strong boots instead of in satin slippers. Miranda proved a good and loving wife, an active, devoted worker for God. Mr. Hartley

was a shrewd observer and a clever judge, but he never was able to decide the question which often presented itself to his mind: which was the better daughter, worker, and wife—the young convert from heathen darkness, or her fair sister,

HAROLD'S BRIDE.





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